

# Unwrapped Vengeance

Lenore Hersman Marks

## **Dedications**

- To my mother, who had the foresight to give me a college education.
- To my husband who encouraged and gave hours of his time working with me.
- To me sons who shared with me experiences and understood.
- To my sisters and their husbands who were forever there for us.
- To all families who have nearly been destroyed trying to settle an estate.
- To all those who served in the Gulf War.
- To all people with cancer and those that loved and cared for them.

## Prologue

Retirement is an event in a person's life with unexpected adjustments.

I retired as a third grade public school teacher and my husband retired as a Construction Equipment Operator (CEO) from the City of Cleveland, Ohio. Like others, this was to be a time of leisure, togetherness and choosing our use of time. We travelled, spent time in our cabin, and enjoyed our sons and grandchildren.

The book, **Unwrapped Vengeance**, is the history of eight years (1989-1996) after retirement and the unexpected, unpredicted frustrations, hurts, and disappointments that invaded our lives. At the present, cancer is the biggest invader. We await the outcome, with faith in the will of Jesus Christ, for the remaining years of our life together.

Names of persons, places and locations have been changed.

Lenore Hersman Marks  
Garfield Heights, Ohio  
1996

## Prologue Addendum

Robert Jackson (Jack) Marks passed away from cancer on August 30, 1996. Lenore Hersman Marks passed away from complications due to cancer on September 6, 2002.

In the copy of the book Mom gave me, a sheet was supplied identifying the true identities of the renamed characters in **Unwrapped Vengeance**. The names of the fictional characters have been removed and replaced by the real names.

Robert J. Marks II  
McGregor, Texas  
2004

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# Chapter 1

## Beginning of the End

Hunting season ended. The out of state eighty-five dollar license bought Jack no luck. He had no deer to take home with him.

Jack and I knew his eighty-six year old mother would be waiting for the van to come down out of the holler. Each morning, before the sun came up, she stood at the kitchen window in the back of the house and looked out the window as she drank her first cup of black coffee and smoked her first cigarette of the day. From this window, she watched and became friends with the wild animals, watched the garden grow, and the seasons come and go. She also saw the few cars that went up and down the holler, and knew every car.

As Jack and I came closer to the hundred year old farm house, we could not see the silhouette of his mother in the window. Ormeda was not at the window.

Our thoughts went wild as we hurried out of the van, through the gate and up the narrow, winding sidewalk to the side door of the house. Opening the door, we saw Jack's sister, Betty, sitting at the dining room table, holding up her head with her hand. She had come from Colorado to go with her mother for cataract surgery and for Thanksgiving. Ormeda would not go for surgery unless Betty was there to go with her. This was the morning surgery had been scheduled, a reason for the early rising. The ash tray was full of cigarette butts and Betty's coffee cup was empty. Ormeda, their mother, was nowhere to be seen.

"Sis, where's Mom?" Jack greeted Betty.

"We've had a terrible thing happen. Mom's in the living room. I've been up since three o'clock."

"Is everything all right?"

"I don't know. Mom came looking for me. She heard my cough and came to see if I were all right. I was in the bathroom. I could hear the pecking of her cane. She came to the bathroom and slipped on the towel I had under my feet. She fell, all ninety-three pounds, flipped into the bathtub." The event of the night was catching up with Betty and there was desperation in her voice. "I'm not much bigger than she is, but I put my arm under her and together we got her out of the tub and zigzagged into the living room sofa."

“I don’t see how you did it.”

“Step by step. Her right leg is really bad. She’s in a lot of pain.”

“Hi, Mom. Hear you had a rough night. How are you doing?” Jack asked gently.

Ormeda, tiny and petite, sat on the large sofa in front of a huge gas stove. As always, she was strong and in control. “I have a pain in my arm and right here,” and her hand covered her pelvic region.

“Let me see.” Kindness radiated in Jack’s blue eyes, so like his mother’s. “Does your arm hurt when you raise it?” and carefully, oh, so carefully he helped her raise her arm. “Tell me if and when it hurts.”

“There’s pain. I hurt all over.”

“Mama, you have to go for x-rays.” She was not prepared for this.

“Do I have to? The roads are so slippery and bad.”

“You should.” Jack was careful to move slowly with this idea. “You know I have four-wheel drive and I’ll be careful.”

Betty cancelled the scheduled cataract surgery. Jack took a section of the fence that surrounded the farm house down. He drove the van as near the front door as possible. Carefully and with care, he carried his fragile mother down the icy steps and sat her in the front seat of the van. He wrapped her legs in a blanket. Together they started the twenty mile journey over the one lane country roads to the nearest hospital. Betty and others followed in a rental car she’d picked up at the airport.

The doctor made the report. “No arm fracture but an old fracture here, see,” looking at the x- rays. “She’s badly bruised. There’s a hairline fracture of the pelvic bone.”

“What does that mean? Can I go home?”

“It means you can go home but you must stay off your feet for two or three weeks. I’ll give you a prescription for pain “

Friday was an exhausting day for everyone. Betty had to return to Colorado on Tuesday. That gave Jack and I time to make a quick trip home and return in time to be with Ormeda twenty- four hours a day.

Everyone dreaded Betty’s departure. Everyone, except Ormeda, sat at the family-sized living dining room table as they had done so many times. Uncertainty and sadness was on everyone’s face. Without warning, Betty said, “Anyone who crosses my path will be sorry. I wait for them and get even with them. Paul says I’m like a time bomb ready to go off.”

No one said anything. There was a long silence. Why was she saying this?

“I try to analyze why they are acting that way,” I said, not wanting to be a goody-good.

Another farewell statement from Betty left everyone wondering. “Debbie and I were a team while I was here. Mom is independent and in control. I liked the way the doctor talked directly to her.”

Everyone respected Ormeda’s opinions, her age and her position in the family and knew she was in control and independent. No one knew why they were being told this.

Being Jack's wife, I let this pass. "Betty, it would help me if we made a list of the medications and the time they are to be taken. Also, any symptoms I am to watch for."

Together we made a list of the medications and other important information and I taped it on the cabinet door for all to see.

Betty said private good-byes to her mother in the living room. As she passed us in the dining room and said her impersonal farewell, I thought she had conditioned herself to be strong.

Betty held her brother Jack's arm and they walked down the narrow, snow-covered sidewalk to the rented sports car. Betty seemed secure in the knowledge she paid a woman to come in four hours each day and made arrangements for Debbie's daughter, Jennifer, to spend week-ends with Ormeda for four dollars a night. Jack and I understood these arrangements..

Debbie, Ormeda's granddaughter, lived in a converted one-room schoolhouse on the farm. Ormeda, in recent years, depended on her for bookkeeping, banking and getting groceries. In return Debbie lived rent free, got free gas to heat her home and was helped in many ways by her grandmother. Although Ormeda had many grandchildren, Debbie seemed to be her favorite.

Jack and I moved into Ormeda's bedroom on the first floor to be near Ormeda. She insisted she sleep on the sofa. From our bed, we could see her petite form, in a sitting position, cuddled under a red and black checked blanket, her feet extended on a small wooden chair. She looked uncomfortable. Helen, the help Betty hired, arrived at eight o'clock the next morning, just as she did each week day. She put her boots in the hall, took off the scarf that covered short, black hair, and hung her threadbare brown tweed coat on the back of the dining room chair. She went to the kitchen stove to put on coffee for Ormeda. I took the curlers out of my hair and slipped on a turquoise velour housecoat. I entered the dining room on my way to the bathroom. I noticed Helen was shorter than I, with arched eyebrows above brown eyes that danced and twinkled when she talked. "Good morning. I'm Lenore, Jack's wife. And you're Helen?" I could tell I was going to like her. She went in to talk to Ormeda with a half cup of black coffee in a cracked cup Ormeda did not want in clorox water as they sometimes did with the other dishes. She explained that cup had its own special place by the kitchen window. When Helen, a name that did not go with the brown hair and eyes, returned to the kitchen, I showed her the schedule for Ormeda's medicine and the notes posted on the cabinet. She would give the morning medicine and Jack and I would be responsible for it after she left. Helen put on a pot of pinto beans to cook, explaining Ormeda liked them brought to a boil, then the water emptied off and new water put in to finish cooking them. She made a large pan of corn bread, using self-rising white corn meal. Jack, Ormeda, and I had a piece of the fresh from the oven corn bread, to Helen's delight and satisfaction. Four hours and she left, food cooked for our evening meal.

I decided I did not want to interrupt Helen's responsibilities or interfere with her relationship with Ormeda. I sensed this job was important to her, and she needed the money. I knew Ormeda had been her teacher. I felt the mutual

feeling of caring they had for each other.

Jack was surprised when Helen showed him the check book and said, "I'll tell you one thing, this many groceries never comes into this house."

Debbie, nearly thirty, attractive and the apple of her grandmother's eye, came in the afternoon to visit. She went into the living room and sat in the large gray vinyl chair next to the sofa and Ormeda, pulled her long thin legs under her and began smoking. She lit her grandmother's cigarette. They smoked together, saying little. I sensed my presence was unwanted and to escape the path of smoke that came my way, I excused myself and went into the kitchen to wash the lunch dishes. I began to wonder if I were needed, or even wanted. No one had invited Jack and I to come. We had assumed we were needed and because we both were retired were happy to be there. That evening Debbie picked up her two children, Jennifer and Misty, when they got off the school bus. They visited for two hours. I began to question if this were to be daily. It interrupted our dinner. I wondered if they felt threatened by our presence.

Debbie and I took our first trip to the grocery store. She selected the groceries and paid for them with a check signed by Ormeda. When we got back to the farm, she took part of the groceries to Ormeda, and to my surprise, left most of the groceries in the van.

"You can use the van" I told her and she took the other groceries to her home.

Again we went to the grocery store, and again the groceries were paid for with a check signed by Ormeda. This time she bought large bags of dog and cat food, and Ormeda had no pet animals. In my mind, I thought it was not right that Ormeda paid for all this, but knew it was none of my business. I was there to help.

Jack said to his mother, "If I ever came back to the farm, I would have to be in complete charge." Ormeda became very upset. This would mean Jack would take over paying the bills and the banking, but it would also close the loophole Debbie had found so convenient. Jack began buying the groceries, paying for them except for coffee, garbage bags, and disinfectants. Jack mentioned to his mother he thought Debbie was taking from her.

"I think Debbie sometimes takes from me, but I really don't care." After that, I thought, why should we care?

I did care. It was a matter of honesty and character.

Debbie repeatedly said to me. "Your son's family gets the most money from Ormeda at Christmas." She always gave each grandchild and great grandchild ten dollars. Bob's family got fifty dollars. If it were figured for each of Ormeda's children it would be Debbie and her sisters that got the most. Yet this was not the point either. She said it cost Ormeda four hundred twenty dollars to mail this out each Christmas. One night when I couldn't sleep, I began counting. This was a hundred dollars more than I could count. I counted again and again.. Would Debbie do this to her grandmother?

The next morning I blurted out to Helen, "It doesn't cost four hundred twenty dollars to mail out the Christmas checks, does it?" We came up with the same amount I had. I was doing what I said I wouldn't do. I asked Ormeda,

“How much does it cost to mail ten dollars to each of the kids?”

“Well, I send Paul’s two children money.” This was Betty’s second marriage and Betty had no children. But that still left quite a bit of unaccountable money. I dropped the subject. I hated to see where this could lead.

## 1.1 Out With an In-Law

Ormeda was progressively getting better, the doctor having put her on pain pills, cough medicine and a heart pill. She was strong willed, determined and sometimes cooperative.

“No one has seen my body but Helen and Debbie,” she told me, so I thought she would let Helen help her. I never told her I’d seen her body once when she was bathing on the back porch.

Helen and I entered the room together. “Ormeda, I think you’ll feel better if you put on this gown,” I said trying to be kind. She grabbed the gown out of my hands and threw it on the floor. I don’t remember what she said, but the eye contact between Helen and I let us know we had lost. She was not going to put on the gown. I was hurt, my intentions had been kind and honorable. I said, too firmly, “Ormeda, we have to do a good job or the Health Department will come in.” I held back tears. I left the room. I knew I had touched a fine nerve and I would never ask her to clean up again.

Later Ormeda said to me, “Your idea of cleanliness may be different from mine.” I agreed. It certainly was.

It was winter. It was cold in the old farm house. Jack put a fan in the living room to circulate the warm air. He wrapped Ormeda’s feet in a blanket to keep them warm. He put a cover over the door to keep out the cold air.

Ormeda still slept on the sofa and kept her feet elevated on the small chair. Jennifer liked taking her to the bathroom, using the wheelchair. Other than serving meals, doing dishes, and reading, time went slowly. Jack and I knew we were there out of love for Ormeda and were trying to do our best.

I offered Ormeda a hairbrush. “Not now.”

“I understand. When I was in school we did an activity that let us know how you feel when some one asks you to do something. I often wondered how our children in our classrooms felt when we kept giving them those work sheets to do.” I was searching for a common ground of understanding, since we both had been teachers.

Hatefully, she said, “You’re too analytical.” I knew now my talk must be light; the weather, Jack’s ride on the four-wheeler, what Debbie said on the phone, nothing too thought provoking. In the middle of the night, I heard Ormeda call, “Jack, Jack.” Ormeda had diarrhea. Respecting her modesty and saving her embarrassment, I let Jack help her into the bathroom. I heard her say “It’s what you fed me.”

“But, Mama, we didn’t feed you anything. You had the choice. The only thing different was the applesauce. I think it is the antibodies the doctor put you on. They tore up my guts after my heart sugery and I had to quit taking them.”

Through the ice and sleet, Jack and I drove to the Laundromat fourteen miles away and washed the dirty sheets and clothing. Praises for Debbie were continuous. Never once did she show appreciation to us.

I was pleased Jack had cleared it with her that it was not the food I had served that caused her problem. I knew now to stay in the background, not to

impose my ideas on her, and to be careful about what she ate. I was trying to know Ormeda, a mother-in-law of forty years. I was not being too successful.

## Chapter 2

# Christmas

Christmas, 1989, arrived in the big farm house. Debbie and I discussed Christmas dinner on the phone.

“I have a turkey. I think I’ll have dinner here.”

I planned and began preparing Christmas dinner. Ormeda, now walking using a cane, slowly entered the kitchen, parked the cane and stood at the counter looking out the window toward the holler. Between puffs of her cigarette, she said to me, “Debbie usually fixes Christmas dinner.”

I wanted to scream. Very composed, I answered, “I checked it out with Debbie and she said she usually fixes Thanksgiving and Easter dinner. She said she would have Christmas dinner at her house.”

I was still in the kitchen preparing dinner when Debbie and her two children arrived. Her eyes roamed around the room, first looking at the red carnation center piece her sister Elizabeth had sent from Tennessee, then the food cooking on the stove, the pies, the cakes, everything. She then brought Misty’s doll to show me. I wondered if she had changed her mind and was wanting to eat with us. I said nothing, but kept on working.

Rebecca, the youngest of her sisters, arrived with her baby daughter. Jack left to get Basil, his first cousin, that lived in the house at the adjoining farm.

After what seemed like a very long time, Debbie said, “I’d better get down to the house.. Kurt’s brothers are coming for dinner.” She and the girls left. I knew she was not going to eat with us, but certainly wanted to know what we were having.

Ormeda opened her last Christmas presents, a large mug with a picture of a cow and a cow for a handle from my son, Bob.

“Ormeda, drink from this once so I can tell Bob.” I noticed it was clumsy for her as she put her tiny fingers through the handle. I hoped it would replace the cup with the dirty crack but could see why it wouldn’t. Then she opened gifts from Gene and Eula.

Christmas was lonely away from our home, few cards, no tree, no gifts, only phone calls from people that knew we were there. We missed our son, Ray, and Christmas with him.

Helen had Christmas Day off. She arrived at eight Tuesday morning, trudging through the extra four inches of snow.

Jack's brother, Max, from Florida, was coming today. Tuesday started off as every day did, breakfast, dressing, and Jack taking a ride of the four-wheeler in the winter weather.

Ormeda said to me, "If I spent as much time on myself as you do I'd be beautiful." Helen doing much of the work gave me time to take care of myself, and I knew I could do nothing for Ormeda.

"You might be," I laughed, remembering our standards for cleanliness were different.

Helen helped me out. "She's used to getting ready to go teach and still does it." I didn't let this pass. I sat in the overstuffed chair near Ormeda.

"I don't do nearly as much as some people. I don't use foundation, eye liner, eye shadow and all that stuff. Betty and Debbie both put on a lot of make-up. Maybe it's because she works for Marilee Kay."

"They wanted my daughter to work selling cosmetics. I said 'No way'." said Helen.

"Really all that is needed is a cleansing cream, toner, and moisturizer. Let's try it for a month, Ormeda, and see if you like it." I knew this would not happen. I gave one last try.

"Max knows how I look. I don't even need to brush my hair." She didn't and no one forced the issue.

Helen entertained us talking about her horses. Jack took her in the van across the meadow to meet her son.

For lunch, Ormeda ate bean broth cooked with left-over Christmas ham and corn bread. Walking with her cane, she carried her plate back to the kitchen.

This was the best gift of all, Ormeda walking and her determination.

## Chapter 3

# Hell After Christmas

Gene, Ormeda's youngest son, called from Ohio. He and his wife Eula would come down and relieve Jack and I. We could have a few days at our home. Immediately we packed dirty clothes, our suitcases, and other things, and put them by the door. We left behind anything we would use when we returned..

Max, Melba, and their daughter drove in from Florida. Carefully they chose their footsteps as they came up the icy sidewalk to the side door.

"Be careful, those steps are icy," I said as I met them at the door. Max looked older, balding and wearing glasses. He looked like his father. His brown eyes avoided mine. He did not speak.

Melba, blonde, wearing dangling earrings, sported tight tie-died jeans, white blouse, vest and boots. She was friendly and remarked about how cold it was, and put her jacket on. Their daughter, typically teen-age, wore dark leotards and oversized sweater. Golden brown curls hung down the right side of her face.

I knew they wanted to visit Ormeda so I began washing dishes.

"Gene and Eula are coming, too." I said, thinking they would be pleased.

"What's their number?" Max, as quick as a flash, was out of his chair.

I got the phone book out of the buffet. "All the phone numbers are here."

I heard him say, "You don't need to come. I'll be here. It'll save you a trip."

Max hunted for his cup of coffee and Melba ate chicken they'd brought with them.

"We have beans and corn bread," I told them. This was Ormeda's favorite food.

Jack saw their car and came immediately to the house. He took off his heavy coveralls. All Melba, Ormeda and I could hear from the living room were words, "Debbie...sue...oil." Melba stopped talking. "Listen, what are they saying? I heard them mention Debbie."

"I don't know. It's between them."

Chairs screeched. Voices got louder.

"You're married to Max and I'm married to Jack. You stay with Max and I'll stay with Jack." and Melba and I hugged.

"Max can be hot headed sometimes," she said, and I knew Jack could too.

Jack's voice demanded, "Come on, Lenore, let's go. Get everything."

I began setting things out on the icy steps. I tried to protect Jack since his heart surgery. I returned to the bedroom and got the things we planned to leave. We carried things to the van. Max started to help.

"Get your filthy hands off our stuff," Jack said to Max. Jack threw things in the back of the van, load after load, in a hurry to get away.

Jack and I traveled fourteen miles to the court house. He had papers legalized. Breaking the silence, I said, "Gene and Eula are not coming."

"I'm going back after the four-wheeler. Max is not going to use it. Gene, yes, Max, no".

The fourteen miles back seemed longer. Max's van was gone. Soon he, Basil, Debbie and the two girls arrived and became an audience as Jack tried to load the four-wheeler on the back of a home-made trailer.

I felt sorry for Jack. It was snowing. He had no gloves. He'd try to ride up on the boards, the four-wheeler would slip, he'd try again and it would slip again. He found a metal gate against the barn. He used it for a ramp.

Basil couldn't stand it any longer. He came over to Jack and said, "Let me help you." They all watched as Jack and Basil pushed the four-wheeler on the trailer and tied it in place.

"Lenore, please get my books." I didn't want to go back in the house, but how could I refuse Jack who was alone in whatever had happened. When I entered to get his Bible, Concordance and study books, Ormeda was leaned over the counter, looking out the window, puffing a cigarette. Debbie was with her. She left when she saw me.

"Lenore, is that you?" she said, never turning her head. "I want to talk to you."

I stood beside her, leaned over and put my arm around her frail, thin body.

"Is Jack having a devil tantrum?" she said, never changing her gaze out the window.

"No, he's having a Christ tantrum." It was the first time I'd ever spoke disrespectful to my mother-in-law. I didn't know whether she heard me or not, since her hearing had worsened. I was steaming. I had returned to get his Bible and she was saying this.

"What happened?" she asked.

"I don't know what happened, Ormeda." My voice softened. I really didn't know. Jack had not talked to me.

"I can tell you what happened," Max said. He started to explain how Jack had ask him to keep the check book from Debbie until he got back because Jack thought Debbie was taking money from Ormeda.

I got Jack's books. Basil offered to carry them. Max said, "Let me carry them. Maybe I'll get to talk to him."

"Ormeda, I'll take care of Jack and you take care of yourself." I knew her concerns for him since his surgery.

"I'm not important."

"Yes, you are. I've known you forty years, as long as I've known Jack and you are important."

“Keep in touch.”

“I will.”

Max said again, “Jack thinks Debbie is taking money.”

This time I felt nervous and was hyper. “Max, it’s not money that’s important. Money is nothing. It’s character, a soul. Get back to your roots.” I thought of my mother. “We’re not the only people that thinks it. Find out for yourself.”

Hadn’t Helen showed me the checks written for groceries and said, “Groceries of that kind never came into this house”? Hadn’t Max’s wife said just that day that when she and Max were in the last time they saw discrepancies in the check book? Hadn’t I suspected it when I went shopping with Debbie? Was Max hesitant to admit it because he and Melba had helped Debbie when she got pregnant out of wedlock and Jennifer was born?

Was Ormeda locked into the fact that Kurt was not Jennifer’s real father and she wanted to bare the burden of Jennifer’s support, even if it encouraged dishonesty in her granddaughter? And what about the other grandchildren that did not share any such rewards? All of this was going through my mind, but I dare not express it. Jack had.

“Uncle Jack’s going across the meadow. He’s leaving you.”

“Oh, he’ll be back.” I knew he would, but I did not know he drove circles in the meadow to avoid Max, whom he saw carrying the books toward the van.

Jack came back. Max and Jack spoke not a word to each other. Basil came to the window of the van.

“I’m so sorry. Just like my brother and I. I love you.” he said to Jack and I.

“We love you, too.”

Jack started again the six hour drive home, with the four-wheeler trailing behind us in the trailer. We felt Basil was our only friend.

Jack didn’t talk, just listened to radio tapes. He was bitter, hurt, angry, feeling rejection. I knew this was no time for me to talk either. I had seen the pretentious, exaggerated behavior of Debbie and her daughters toward Ormeda. I had seen how they “put on” when others were around I knew we had been sincere in our efforts to do a good job.

Jack and I arrived home exhausted and bewildered. The dining room table was filled with mail. Jack began sorting, bills, Christmas cards, junk mail. We waited for Ray to come home from work.

“Hi, Dad.” Ray was home. It’d been a month since we’d seen him.

“Hi, Ray.” This was their usual greeting.

“Merry Christmas,” I said, a day late. “Your Dad and Max had a quarrel, so we came home. Did you go to Gene and Eula’s for Christmas dinner?”

“No, I couldn’t. I had to DJ.”

“Did you call them?”

“No, John was over and I told him. Dad, come see my new computer.” They played computer games the rest of the day. I went out to eat with my neighbor.

Jack and I avoided the subject of what had happened. Each of us was depressed, trying to live with the pain and not let our hurt rub off on the other.

Gene called. "Do you want to see Lesa play basketball?"

"No, Jack. I don't want to go. I want to be away from people."

"I'll go see my niece play. Yes, pick me up."

Gene and Eula arrived with two homemade fruit cakes and a canister of cookies for Ray. They had a nine-by-ten graduating picture of Lesa. We gave them peach-colored Fostoria.

"Please go."

"I'll go."

Lesla's team lost. I ask Eula if they called Ormeda to find out two things for me. Did the doctor come? Had Ormeda moved from the sofa to her own bed?

I had been concerned she wasn't resting well and had given her bed to us so we'd be nearby. They listened. Max had told them he did not need Jack's money, he'd made \$75,000 last week. Gene had answered, "That wasn't the story a few weeks ago."

Max left the farm a day early for Florida.

Eula called me from the mall. No, the doctor had not come. No, Ormeda had not moved from the sofa. Gene had hung up when talking to his mother. He had been supportive of us.

"You'll never find anyone more honest than Jack. Jack used the word "bastard" to two people. Isn't the word bastard used in the Bible?"

Sunday, Jack called Ormeda's. Basil answered. Rain with the melting snow had caused the creek to overflow and he could not get home. It was ten A. M. Basil had volunteered to spend nights with Ormeda since we left.

Talking to Basil was always calming.

"Jack, I need to know what happened." I thought it was now safe to ask.

"I'll tell you," he began. "Max was on the phone with an oil man when I came in, making threats about a law suit over the oil company fracturing into a gas well, of which Max owns some of the royalties. After he hung up, I tried to explain there was no permanent damage to the well, and it was his request all wells be drilled one thousand feet apart. I then explained we were suspicious of Debbie's handling of Mom's affairs and ask him to hold Mom's checkbook until I returned in three days. He gave me to understand Mom is capable of making these judgments and things would be back the way they were .

"We got back to talking about the oil wells and I told Max the law suit with the oil company would have to include me as I owned a working interest in the wells involved. His answer was, 'I'll sue your ass, too.' I replied, 'Please don't sue me using Mom's money.'

"He immediately wrote me a check for one thousand dollars from monies of Mom's for surface damage to the farm. He feels that he has the authority to spend money because he was given Power of Attorney in respect to Mom's surface overseeing the lease.

"Later in the living room he said, 'Want to ask you something. Did you call Jennifer a bastard?' I had.

"Max glared at me.

"I told Betty in a heated discussion that Mom's re to me were that she took care of Debbie to maintain a home because of Jennifer's illegitimacy. I used the

words, 'Debbie's bastard.'"

"Max jumped from the chair and ran toward me with clenched fists and ashtray breath, and right under my nose told me, 'You're about the lowest son-of-a-bitch there is.'

"I replied, 'I have the same mother as you.' I stuck my big belly out toward Max and dared him to hit me. Max walked away and I started carrying things to the van."

I had enjoyed watching the oil trucks come and go, the tall rig lighted at night and listening to Helen talk about drilling gas and oil wells. She was very knowledgeable.

Now I made sense of this. The explosion between Max and Jack was about oil wells, Debbie's greediness and the word "bastard". Could Max be jealous because Jack and I bought shares in six wells? Betty had said, "If I buy shares it will be from Max." This was the first we knew he was in the business of selling oil shares.

The phone was Jack's outlet for emotions.

He called Helen and told her that there was a prescription at the pharmacy for Ormeda and he would not be back.

He called Max and told him he no longer represented him on legal matters concerning the oil wells.

He called Debbie and apologized. He would "never hurt that little girl and had said nothing to Jennifer about her being a bastard."

He called Basil and ask him to make sure Ormeda understood he did not call Jennifer a bastard to her face.

He called Betty.

"Did you tell Max I called Jennifer a bastard?"

"I probably did."

Jack hung up.

He called his mother and let her know he was a bastard.

"But I married him," she said.

1990. We watched in the New Year with my sister and her husband in Ohio.

"I think Mom will give me complete control." Jack said as we ate sauerkraut, pork, and mashed potatoes on New Year's Day. If we went to Florida with my sister and her husband, this would be an out for Ormeda.

"Are Jack and Lenore in Florida?" Ormeda asked over and over. She knew we had cancelled the trip previously to be with her after she fell in the tub. Now she thought we would go.

Jack would tell her, "Mom, I want to be here and Lenore wants to be with me. We put everything on hold." She could not accept the fact her sons had a squabble, almost a fight, the day after Christmas.

Gene stopped to visit Jack. I was still in bed. I wanted Gene and Jack to have time to visit, so I lay quietly. They were talking and laughing so as to not awaken me. Little was said about our month at the farm. I appreciated his visit.

Jack requested I send Ormeda an itemized account of our expenses, after deducting phone calls. It was about seventy dollars. Jack wrote, in sprawling

handwriting in the margin, "A check for more than \$74.48 will be null and void. Debbie will pay \$2.85 she owes me for milk herself."

The check arrived in the self-addressed stamped envelope I had sent. Ormeda had signed the check, but the rest was in Debbie's handwriting. The memo read: Expenditures for Ormeda in full. I studied what the memo meant and tried not to read into it any more it was a businesslike thing to do. I fought the idea that "in full" had underlying connotations that we would be asking for more, and tried to not view it as an honesty slam. There was no thank you, only the payment due us.

I mustered up nerve and dialed the phone. I talked to Basil, then Ormeda.

"The check has arrived."

When she asked how Jack was doing her voice was weak. When I answered "Fine", she had trouble hearing me.

"Take care of him."

I remembered Basil's kind goodbye as I talked to him again.

"We just wanted Ormeda to know we got her check."

"Bet you needed that to buy groceries. Bet you got them today." Basil was teasing me. He knew Jack and I didn't need that money.

"No, it's right here. It's what we spent when we were there, fruit, prescriptions, and other things. We paid our own way. Just a matter of business. I'm glad you're there with Ormeda."

"My concerns were Jack. His nose was bleeding when we were loading the four-wheeler. You're two of my best friends. He said he was sick. I don't want the same thing to happen that happened between my brother and I," again referring to his brother dying of cancer without them ever reconciling their differences.

"What about the oil wells?" I asked.

"They're going to start drilling on the "hippies" farm tomorrow. He's upset over this." Jack had called the man a hippie to his face, not knowing to whom he was talking. This had caused an uproar in the community.

"I'd be upset, too. He's from the city and it's hard to understand how you can own the surface and not own what's under the ground. Has the doctor been there?"

"He's coming tomorrow."

"Is she sleeping on the sofa?"

"Yes. She says she's slept sitting up ever since she hurt her back. I never knew that. She's warm. I'm glad I can be here."

"It gives you a purpose."

"Right. She says Jack and you took good care of her." At last, a compliment from Ormeda.

"We tried to."

"I'll call if anything happens. I'll stay as long as I'm needed."

"Thank you, Basil. We'll be back. Good-night."

My voice was unsteady. I had wanted to say I missed Ormeda. I cared. I was suffering and hurt, and so was Jack. I could never talk to Ormeda that way.

Ironically, I cashed the check the next day and bought groceries.

I heard Jack on the phone while I was cutting up beef for stew. “Debbie, when are you going to send the money for the milk I bought you?”

“I’ll have it in the mail today.”

“O K,” and clunk, the phone went down.

“Have you called Lorna yet?” Jack asked me in a very demanding voice.

“I mailed her a letter this morning.”

“I told her you’d call and tell her about the thyroid pills you’re taking.” I called.

## Chapter 4

# Unexpected Encouragement

Lorna, Jack's first cousin, lived with her mother, Ormeda's sister. She and her husband, Cliff, were retired from the teaching profession, and traveled back and forth from her mother's to their home in Ohio. When I called, I was transferred to Ohio. Jack talked to Lorna. I heard him say, "I took three nitroglycerine pills while I was loading the van." I had not known this.

"Lorna, I've been on thyroid pills since I was twenty-eight years old. Small dosage. They really helped me. They took away my puffiness and made me feel real alert. Also helps me keep my weight down."

"Hope they help me."

"I miss being at the farm. Ormeda and I have always identified on an intellectual level. I'd never go in and hug her. Maybe put my hand on her shoulder. She told me she's not important."

"She's calling out for recognition. Sometimes I think there's competition between her and Mom for attention. The minister wanted to visit Aunt Ormeda but she said she wasn't ready yet. You tell Jack when Max gets through his mid-life crisis, he'll be all right." We both laughed.

The talk with Lorna was excellent therapy for Jack and I. We began watching the football game, Cleveland Browns vs. New York Buffalo Johns. Cleveland was ahead. Browns won, 34 to 30.

My youngest sister, Justine, called the farm to talk to us. She talked to Basil. Basil told her we no longer stayed with Ormeda, we'd gone home. She mailed us her schedule in Florida and invited us to go with them.

My daughter-in-law called and invited me to go to France with the family in March. I knew Bob and Monika needed me and it would be an opportunity that would not repeat itself. Could I go to both Florida and France and leave Jack alone in the midst of family turmoil? -page 26

Debbie's check arrived for \$2.85. memo: Gallon milk paid in full. The check was to both Jack and I. The money was unimportant but helping Debbie assume responsibility was.

I stayed up late reading. My decision to go to France was almost a certainty now. A blizzard was raging outside.

Next morning, Jack answered the phone. Helen said Ormeda wanted to talk to Jack.

“How are you?”

“I’m fine, Mama. How are you?”

“I’m doing all right.” This was the way she always answered.

“How’s Lenore?”

“She’s fine.”

A long pause, then, “That’s all I want to know. Goodbye.”

A phone call from Ormeda was rare and unusual. She cared for us. After seventeen days of doubt, the love of a mother for her son had survived.

The mailman brought a letter and Florida schedule from Justine. “Sorry about Ormeda but that’s the way things go in a crisis. When everyone should work together in a crisis, emotions are so explosive and ‘on your sleeve’ that sometimes emotions take over instead of common sense. Maybe things will calm down and you can help Ormeda at a later time. I’m certain you did a great job, so give yourselves a pat on the back.

“Hope to see you soon. Jack, you be sure to come if Lenore goes to France. Love you two, Justine.”

I cried. Someone understood. I was grateful for two sisters that were uncondemning and encouraging. I appreciated Lorna. My decision to go to France was made easier.

Jack called the farm on Saturday night, wanting to talk to Basil about taxes on the oil. Debbie answered.

“Basil has gone to the auction.”

Jack hung up.

Six

## Chapter 5

# Jack's Family

Ormeda labeled me analytical. I began to analyze the family into which I had married.

Ormeda and her husband were opposites. She was petite, blue eyed, he stern, black haired, brown eyed. Both were thin. They were middle class Americans, he a construction worker who left home each spring for seasonal employment. She taught school in nearby communities and maintained the farm and family. After the birth of Jack and Betty, he had an affair with a woman, and Ormeda never forgave or forgot.. She talked openly about her hate for him. She said she had three more children "to tie him down but instead put a rope around her neck."

Their first born son was Jack. Jack was abused and this was the talk of the town. He finished eighth grade before entering the army, and served in the occupational army in Trieste, Italy. When he returned he passed the G. E. D. test and attended college one term. He married me and we had two sons, Bob and Ray, fourteen years apart. He was a heavy equipment mechanic and operator through International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 18, District One in Cleveland, Ohio. I was an elementary teacher.

Betty was the only girl in a family of four boys. She left home after high school to attend college. She received her doctorate in rehabilitation. She married twice, no children of her own. After her divorce, she began her own business in Colorado, and was doing exceptionally well. She helped her nieces and nephews, but never gave them money. Her visits home were rare, usually once or twice a year.

Nine years after the birth of Betty, Jimmy was born. When he was two years old, he contracted polio. Ormeda was faithful with therapy. Junior suffered from minor disabilities. Ormeda was over protective of him.

Jimmy married a girl from a foster home. To them was born four girls, Debbie, Kathy, Elizabeth and Rebecca. They divorced. He was granted custody of the girls. Debbie at the age of fifteen became pregnant. He boisterously said, "By God, Debbie and I will raise that kid."

Max and Melba let Debbie stay with them until Jennifer was born. Then

Ormeda baby sat, and Debbie finished high school and married Kurt. They had a daughter, Misty, who looked exactly like her father.

At the age of forty, Jimmy was instantly killed when the farm tractor flipped over on him. All four of his daughters witnessed this tragic accident. The court then awarded custody to Ormeda. Debbie lived in the remodeled schoolhouse of the farm rent free, and Ormeda helped her as much as possible. Debbie ran errands and helped in return. Junior's three other daughters lived with Ormeda until they were out of high school and married. The other grandchildren became of less importance to Ormeda and her other children resented this.

Max and Melba lived in Florida. They had four children, three boys and a girl. Max had his own construction business and Melba was a nurse.

Gene was very young when he married Eula. Their first born had cerebral palsy and died young. They later had John and Lesa. Gene worked construction and Eula was a housewife.

Gene, Eula, Jack and I, in partnership, owned one hundred fifty acres and a cabin up the holler from Ormeda. This gave us a place to stay when Junior and his family moved in with Ormeda.

I had watched the four younger of the children grow from childhood to adulthood. I now began to feel my attachment to them was greater than theirs for me. My marriage to Jack for forty years had been a struggle.

Seven

## Chapter 6

# Reaching Out

The Denver Broncos defeated the Cleveland Browns 27-21 for the American Football Conference Championship January 14, 1990, the third loss in four years for the Browns. Jack and Ray sat at the TV, cheering for the Browns, disgusted with the final score.

Jack went to another basketball game to see his niece play. Her team won. Gene told him the latest oil well on the farm had come in a dry hole. This meant a loss for both us and Ormeda.

Jack was feeling a need to be understood. He called Kathy, Debbie's sister. Debbie was Ormeda's favorite of the four girls, but Jack liked Kathy best.

"Save me a steak." Debbie and Kathy's families butchered a beef a week ago and shared the meat.

"Hear about my big blow up? I want to explain my side and then you can make up your mind. I was upset Debbie was taking money from Mom. I explained it to Max. He said he would have everything back like it was. Max and Betty are down on me. Gene kind of understood. Max ended all I had done, tore it up in ten minutes. I'll never darken Mom's door again unless I can have complete control, and I don't expect that. I used the word "bastard" when I was talking to Betty. She told others about it. Jesus forgives that, too. No way would I hurt that little girl. Hate the day she has to find out about it."

"I know Debbie took from Grandma and has done it for years. Grandma favored Jennifer and Misty over my children. You are becoming the black sheep of the family like I am." As a teenager she had come home drunk and Ormeda gave her trust money and kicked her out. She had made it on her own since then.

"Rebecca and her husband are having marital troubles. He said, 'The day we get money from your trust, I'm gone. Grandma does not know this. Elizabeth's mother-in-law passed away and Elizabeth's having dizzy spells. The twins are doing fine."

An unexpected call came from Ormeda, prime time.

"Basil saw big puffs of black smoke coming from the cabin. He went up to investigate and found an oil line had broken."

Jack immediately called the owners of oil well. “While you’re fixing it, bury the pipe on the left side of the cabin. It’s a bitch to mow around. Max is no longer my spokesman. He’s too wild for me.”

The secretary returned the call. “They will bury the lines sometime when you are in. Then they can be sure of what you want. I made a note about Max.”

“Thank you.”

Jack and Basil were on the phone. “They said they’d be up and fix that oil line. I told him to connect in with the other one.”

“Do you want to talk with your mom?”

“No, I’m talking to you. I have nothing to say to her except business. I changed all my plans to take care of her till her dying day, and look how I was treated. She chose Debbie, the thief, and Max, the asshole. I’ll never darken her door and she’ll never leave there so I’ll never see Mom alive again. I’ll come see you, though. Now I’m going to drive around some, maybe to Florida, after I get my hearing aids.”

“How much will they cost you?”

“Fifteen hundred for both ears. Go to the freezer. See those packages that look almost square. They’re fish, perch. Take them. Mom won’t eat them.”

When they had finished talking, I said, “Jack, I wish you wouldn’t use bad words like that. I thought you’d learn from the word ‘bastard’. They can get you for slander.”

“Quit telling me what to say. I know what to say to the person I’m talking to.”

“I thought you’d learn,” and that finished that.

Jack and I left for Homosassa, Florida to meet Justine, my sister, and her husband, Junior. The drive on the interstate was monotonous, the exit signs reminders of friends who were within reach of visitation, but our goal to be there in three days kept us compulsively driving. We arrived at noon. Junior, all smiles, waving his arms, was at the campground entrance to meet us. I surprised Justine when I walked into the Laundromat.

For twenty-one days we went to tourist attractions, bingo, pot lucks, and at night we had the ever competitive, life-threatening card games. Phone calls were made to relatives and friends. Kathy told us Elizabeth and the twins were coming from Tennessee to the farm for a visit.

On Wednesday, Jack and I began the three day drive home. We stopped in Howardton, West Virginia for the eighteenth birthday of my grand-niece. A gentle snow greeted us when we arrived home.

Eight

## Chapter 7

### A Fight

The dining room table was loaded with mail. Jack and I began separating the wanted from the unwanted. The wanted mail included a letter from Lorna. "Basil called Juanita to see if she could come down and stay with Aunt Ormeda. Juanita was sick, too, so she couldn't go. Jennifer came up and stayed overnight. No one seems to miss the water until the well runs dry. No one appreciated how smoothly things ran when you two were there. You know the art of teamwork, something so many know so little about. It takes teamwork to be successful, doesn't it? Cliff and I have always been a 'team', thus our ability to plan and contribute successfully. Keep in touch and do some nice things for yourself. No use to say 'don't worry about things down here' because you will, however, we'll let you know if anything becomes critical. Right now everything is stable. Love and prayers, Lorna."

This letter uplifted my feelings of rejection and narrowed the gap of connection with Ormeda.

Another wanted letter was a gas and oil check for over three hundred dollars. The trip to the lawyer was paying off.

Sunday, Jack and I went to Lesa's basketball game with Gene and Eula. Her team won 48-32.

Temperature in the house had become an issue between Jack and I after his heart surgery.

"It's too hot in here." I said.

"You get to moving around and working, that's why you're hot." Jack was right. I had worked all day.

"You sit around all day." I knew the truth would sting. Up went the volume on the TV. Up I got, with intentions of unplugging the TV. "You're not controlling me with the volume of the TV."

"Aren't you afraid the neighbors will hear?" Jack said, almost shouting.

"I use to care. I had pride and respect but all that is gone, almost. We might as well make it a hundred per cent."

Wham! Wham! Jack threw his hearing aids at the wall. He kicked the white rocking chair with the teddy bear in it. He knocked over a planter and soil went

all over the carpet.

“Why don’t I ever tear up your things?” I went to the basement to finish the laundry. I could hear the vacuum upstairs.

When I went upstairs, he was looking for the cover of the battery for his hearing aid. He looked worried.

Next morning, Jack gave me that oh-so-familiar look when he’s testing to see where our relationship stands.

“It just happened,” I said.

Ray came down to get ready for work.

Insurance paid to have Jack’s hearing aids repaired. I could never replace the rocking chair he had destroyed.

Nine

## Chapter 8

# France

A special card of thanks arrived.

February 18, 1990

“A most appreciative congregation of the United Methodist Church wishes to thank you for helping secure gas for church use. The value to them is immeasurable.” It was signed by the superintendent and the pastor, and addressed to both Jack and I. This was the country church across the meadow from the farm house.

I needed to call Ormeda before going to France. Uncertainties of being away for a month began to twist at my mind. Jack said it was all right. Basil answered.

“I picked up your voice right away,” he said, speaking softly as he always did.

“How have you been?”

“I’m just getting over the flu.” “How’s Ormeda?”

“The doctor was here last night and said she is doing fine. She’s asleep now.”

“Is she sleeping on the sofa yet?”

“Yes, she says it hurts her back to sleep on the bed. I’m sleeping in her bed. Was she sleeping in her bed before the fall?”

“I don’t know. I thought so. I called to let you know I’m going to France February. Weren’t you in France?”

“Yes, but I didn’t like it. Hope you like it better than I did.”

“Wait, and I’ll get pencil and something to write on. Ormeda’s awake. Do you want to talk to her?”

“Can she hear me? Yes, let me talk to her. Ormeda, this is Lenore. I just wanted you to know I’m going to France with Bob and his family. I’ll be back April Fools’ Day, April first.”

“Betty wants to know how Jack is.” Betty wants to know. Interesting, I thought.

“Jack’s doing fine. He caught a five pound bass in Florida and played golf with Junior.”

“I thought you were still in Florida.”

“No, we came home early, so I could get ready for my trip. Jack will take care of Ray and Ray will take care of his dad. We heard from Kathy about Elizabeth and the twins.”

The conversation came alive. “They’re so cute and just laugh.”

“I wanted to see them and hold them. Sorry I missed them.”

I offered the phone to Jack. He shook his head. “We’ll be down in the spring. We miss you. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye.” No “Have a good time in France,” or, “Say Hi to Bob and Monika.” What did I expect from her, a little concern and caring? Is that what I was groping for and expecting?

“Jack, I blew it, didn’t I?”

“No, you did all right.” He went to bed.

I wished I’d never made the call.

Jack drove me to Detroit on Feb. 27, 1990 where I would meet Bob and his family the next day at the airport. We would continue to France together at 4:35 P. M. Flight 50.

At Irete University in Nantes, Bob, Monika and my three grandchildren, Jeremiah, Josh, and Marilee and I shared an apartment. The cathedrals, castles, narrow streets, rock houses and fences awakened our desire for more knowledge. Books became intriguing. The fresh Brittany air and mineral water revitalized my health. The rash I had gotten in Florida disappeared. I enjoyed every minute, even though the currency and language were barriers to my being independent from Bob and Monika.

Monika’s grandmother Charlotte died. It was impossible for her to return to America for the funeral. Monika grieved. Charlotte and I had been good friends, so I grieved with Monika. It was the night before we were to return from Nantes to Paris. I heard a thump on the bathroom floor. Monika was slumped on the floor.

“Bob, get up. Come quick.” Bob held her in his arms while I wiped her forehead with a damp washcloth. It was night, we knew no French. Slowly she opened her eyes. Perspiration dripped from her forehead.

After a bath, she felt better, but was weak. She thought she could use their water and make tea. The rest of us used bottled water.

In Paris, Bob was able to make the pharmacy understand the kind of medicine she needed. I knew, and Bob and Monika knew, Monika nearly died that night. After that, my love for Monika increased.

Jack, Gene and Eula met us in Detroit. The white wine we had sipped on the airplane pepped us up as we talked excitedly about France.

Ten

## Chapter 9

# Surgery

It was the day after my return from France that I asked Jack about Ormeda. He had called her and Max would visit in April. All were well.

The money from the oil checks had increased substantially. Jack, in response to a request from Max, released a lien to Basil. I thought Max tried to be cordial, but Jack still wasn't ready to accept anything from Max.

When Jack went to the doctor on April 2, the doctor recommended prostate surgery in ten days. Jack didn't want anyone to know except his sons and Gene and Eula. Eula volunteered to be with me during the hour long surgery.

Jack was in pain. "I fear this more than my heart surgery."

Over dinner at a Chinese restaurant, Jack gave me directions. "If I die, take Ormeda's will to the court house and file it. If there is a later will and it includes Junior's family, that's all right. I think the four girls should be included. If they leave me out, contest the will. Mom is not capable of making her own decisions. She can't see or hear. She gave Max Power of Attorney over the oil wells, which shows she thought she was incapable of handling it. Get someone to help you with my will."

Max called that night.

"How was your trip?" I gave a brief description.

"Misty I speak to Jack?"

"I don't want to talk to him. Tell him to talk to Gene."

"I did, but Gene isn't home. Is there anything I can do for you, Max?"

"I'd like to know the amount of your royalty checks. We're each short about three hundred dollars." Max quoted gross sales, percentages and other information.

"Sorry, I can't help you."

"Goodbye."

"Goodbye."

Jack immediately got out of bed. He wanted to know why Max called. He got the files and began computing.

"He's including two wells that we don't get royalties on. Maybe you should call him. It might save him some embarrassment." He would not talk to Max,

yet he would be helpful if he could.

I dialed Max. Busy. Dialed again, busy. Jack said, "Don't worry about it. Piss on him."

Gene's line was busy, so I assumed Gene and Max were talking.

At last, I got Max on the phone and explained oil wells five and six were not included in the royalties. With appreciation in his voice, Max answered, "Thank you."

In preparation for surgery on April twelfth, Jack had X-rays, blood tests and was put on a liquid diet and medication. He was using the bathroom frequently and was on the "pot" when Gene called. They had spent the week end at the farm, and Ormeda was doing well. Jennifer had surgery for appendicitis and they removed a cyst from one ovary. Debbie had not visited during their visit. I would call Eula as soon as I knew the time of Jack's surgery.

Jack wrote directions for me if he should die in surgery. He also wrote what to do to have Ray's car repaired.

A perfectly-timed nine page letter arrived the day before surgery from Lorna. She wrote about the three day revival at the church.

"Nothing has consumed more of my thoughts and prayers than you and the very difficult family upheaval experienced. However, you are too strong and good to allow adversities to consume you. Besides, you could well become the controlling force that would produce change. By that I mean, your strength and goodness might cause some of your brothers and sister attitudes to mellow. Jack, you can be that influence."

Lorna also wrote, "Jack, you and Lenore have too much to give others, of your love and compassion that you must not hide it under a bushel." I finished the letter with tears on my cheeks.

Eula arrived on time to go with Jack and I to the hospital. Ray would come later.

Jack again had pre-surgery questionnaires and medication. He was groggy as he was wheeled past us. I kissed him on the forehead and said, "God bless."

Ray read. Eula and I talked. She shared what was said at the farm the past week end. I couldn't believe so much was being said about Jack, and bad things.

"Jennifer and Misty are afraid Jack will hurt their mother. Ormeda said she didn't like Jack like she use to, he had changed, and that she would write another will, she had twenty-eight people to think of. She wanted to know if Jack would be home for Easter."

I decided not to tell Jack this. Gene could tell him. Hadn't he been hurt enough? I agreed with Eula that everything had been blown out of proportion.

After an hour, the doctor came to tell us Jack was out of surgery.

"Did he get along all right?"

"Sure. I'm a good doctor."

"I didn't mean that. Did you remove a lot of tissue?"

"He'll be like a fire hose."

What kind of doctor was this? I was sincere and he seemed so insincere.

Jack was in recovery. We could visit at two-thirty. Eula went home. Ray and I went home. I called my two sisters. Ray went to get a haircut. We visited as often as allowed.

Rudely, the doctor said, "I don't have anything to do with insurance," and dismissed Jack Saturday, three days after surgery, the amount of time insurance allowed unless an extension was granted.

Jack was in pain and took prescribed medication. He called Lorna, thanked her for the letter, and told her about the surgery.

It had been a long, tiring seven days since Jack's admittance to the hospital. He was not doing as well as I expected, in pain when he urinated, passing blood. I was working extra to take care of his responsibilities as well as mine. On Thursday, he said, "Why don't you call Mom? You said you'd keep in touch."

Basil answered. We talked about my trip to France and the lawns. Then I talked with Ormeda.

"Did you have a good Easter?"

"We had a group here. Jennifer was back in the hospital because she was bleeding."

"I'm sorry. She is so young." Never did she ask about Jack and the boys. Jennifer was important, but not the only one in the world.

"Jack had surgery last Thursday."

"Surgery?"

"Yes, he had prostate surgery. He was in surgery an hour and recovery four hours. I'm doing the best I can. He's home now but in pain."

To make sure Ormeda understood, I talked to Basil again. She kept saying "plastic" and I wanted it understood it was prostate surgery, not heart surgery again.

Basil said, "We wondered what happened to you."

"We wanted all of you to have a good Easter so we didn't tell you. Eula was with me during surgery and my sister and her husband visited. If you have any questions after you've talked it over, call and I'll try to answer them. We love all of you."

I noticed they might have missed us at Easter but not enough to call.

Anyway, Bob and Ray were happy I made the call. Neither Basil or Ormeda ask to speak to Jack.

The news spread. Betty's second husband even called. Kathy called and said Debbie would not be at the family reunion because of the feelings between Jack and her. Jack answered, "I was going to stay home and let her go." Kathy said she would help with the reunion.

After eighteen days, Jack was not recuperating as he should. He refused to see the doctor that acted so unprofessional or go to any other doctor.

Eleven

## Chapter 10

# Jack Returns

Jack bought an outdoor grill, against my wishes. I wanted no part of it since I had enough to do without another responsibility. I was pouting and angry. I told Ray when he brought it home, "He'll have grease all over the side of the house, just like he did at Bob's and Monika's."

In a few minutes, Jack came in the house and sat in the living room. The hurt look told me he was searching for my reaction. He said, "Come and see."

I couldn't believe what I saw. He had melted the yellow vinyl on the house. At least I could wash grease off. I was sick.

"It's our age," I told him trying to conceal my disappointment and protect him. "We'll have to have it fixed."

"You call." It seemed I'd spent forty years helping Jack get out of scrapes and cleaning up his messes.

"You remember those words," and I knew I would.

I cancelled a wedding shower so Jack could go fishing with Gene. He came home late and tired, but they had caught two buckets of perch, cleaned them and had our half ready for the freezer.

After a long nap, Jack said, "I'm going to call Mom." I could hear only his side of the conversation.

"Enjoying this pretty weather, better than December. It was cold back then. Oh, I'm so sorry." Jennifer had gone to the hospital again and Debbie was with her.

"Trying to fix what they screwed up the first time. She's a lovely girl.

"I'm sorry to hear that. She's young and when you're young you have a lot going for you. How's the rest of the family, Debbie, Kurt and the family? I'm glad you're getting along. Helen still coming down? She's your backbone, eh?"

"Hear the church is coming along. Lorna dropped us a line, mostly about the church.

"Got my problems. Slow. Still very tender. Let me say "hi" to Basil."

"Ding-a-ling hurts now more than the day I came home. No, I don't fool with doctors. Be three weeks Thursday. They go in with a wire with a loop and take what they want. Had spinal block. It hurts. Don't bleed as much.

"I still have hurts over what happened down there. Time heals. Max turned on me. I'll never get over some of it. Yes, we're brothers, but it still hurts. Appreciate you." I knew Basil again had tried to heal the hurt between the brothers because of the hurt between him and his brother. Jack called again and inquired about Jennifer.. Why had he planted the thought she was playing her illness for all the attention she could get? Ormeda called when Jennifer came home.

Sunday night I was typing. Jack sat down across from me.

"Stop, I want to talk to you. How about going to a hotel, then to church and then go visit with Mom. I'm ready."

It came now to me and my feelings. "Jack, I don't know whether I can handle it," and tears came to my eyes. "Please understand. I was a part of it too, and I just don't think I can do it."

"I may have to go alone," and that was the way it was left.

I knew the depths of my hurt, the depths of rejection I had felt, more that ever in my life. I did not know how I could return to the country church that had accepted, welcomed and valued our attendance and participation. Years of caring, love and respect had been shaken. Was I ready to risk going in after four months of absence? It couldn't be the same. Was I ready for the change? Why, after forty years of marriage in this family, was I experiencing such humiliation? Was I ready to walk into the farm house as I had done so many times? Was I ready for Jack and his mother's meeting? What if Debbie and Jennifer came? No, I was not. I realized how deep the hurt had grilled itself into my whole being, my soul, my heart, my self-image, and how much of me had been altered and destroyed.

Jack did go alone. I stayed with my sister's family. It was Mother's Day week-end. Jack left early Sunday morning and picked me up that evening. He wanted to say "Happy Mother's Day". to Ormeda, no matter how much "crow he had to eat". I wanted him to, and I thought it best he go alone.

Driving home, I said, "Tell me what happened."

"I stopped at McDonald's and ate. I got off at Route 5 and on my way up to Sand Fork, I met Debbie's car. I don't know who was driving.

"When I got to the farm, I went in the side door and smelled raw natural gas. Basil was at the dining room table reading and drinking coffee. I gave him a hug. He said, 'Ormeda's asleep but go in and wake her'.

"I put my hand on her knee and woke her. 'You haven't gone far since I was here'. She recognized me and laughed. She looked at me real loving-like and said, 'Jack' with a big smile and I leaned over, hugged her and said, 'Happy Mother's Day'. Then we said our how are you and I'm OK's and talked about you staying at your sister's for your grand niece's graduation prom. She accepted this. Basil came in and said he could never see why anyone would like France but of course he was in combat, World War II.

"Then we talked about hearing aids. Basil tried one. Ormeda tried one and said she could hear better. It was on high. She said the whistle wasn't that bad. I told her hearing aids are adapted to the individual and would not squeal. Then Mama showed the large magnifying glass mounted on a swing arm Betty

had sent her. I turned on the illuminating light and looked through it. She said she could read with it for short periods of time until her cataracts started fluttering. Then we discussed scripture.

“Sexy Debbie came through the dining room door. I continued to talk to Mom and Basil. I did not make eye contact with her. She said she’d come to wash Mom’s hair, but she’d wait till our visit was over.

“Still without eye contact, I told her I’d be about ten minutes. In eight minutes, I said goodbye and hugged Mom and said, ‘I love you’. She looked me straight in the eye with good countenance and said, ‘I love you, too’.

“Basil and I walked down by the cars and talked about thirty minutes. We talked about him staying with Mom, how Debbie didn’t help him much. He thinks Debbie has little, if any, affection for Mom. He is totally disgusted with Kurt and explained he had to mow the lawn with a small push mower because Mom said it was Kurt’s Gravely and he didn’t want to have anything to do with the Gravely if it were Kurt’s. Anyway, Basil says he can’t even get relieved from taking care of Mom long enough for his own chores. Hay season’s coming. He needs to take care of cutting and putting up his own hay. Basil was wondering if he could get someone to watch Mom for the part of the day Helen wasn’t there. I told Basil I had nothing to do with it, I had been curtailed by Betty and Max. They would have to make arrangements for Mom’s care. I added I would not stand by and let Mom have no care. I just couldn’t do that.

“Basil told me he was glad I came. I told him I came partly because he said Mom would like to see me, and that he’d said he’d go through hell to see his mother. Basil said, ‘You’d better believe it’. He told me to get in good standing with Max.

“Basil and I said goodbye. I drove across the meadow and walked up the hill to the cemetery with my flower for our daughter’s grave. I pushed the cross in the ground. I looked over the cemetery at my dad’s, brother, aunts and uncles and my grandparent’s tomb stones. I reminisced how I remembered them. I walked down the hill to my car.

“Basil stopped for final good-byes since he’d found a few minutes to go to his house while Debbie washed Mom’s hair.

“Church was letting out. I greeted everyone and told them I had mixed feelings about winning seventeen hundred dollars at the dog races. I explained you weren’t ready to come back yet, that our wounds were deep and complete healing would probably never happen. Lorna said even if it did there would be noticeable scars. I expressed gratitude for their support.”

Now the question seemed to be: Who would pay if Basil needed time off? Ormeda could afford to pay. Basil was willing to pay but was it his responsibility? He had taken care of his mother till her death, and his Aunt Ormeda wasn’t his responsibility. He had stayed nights with her since Jack and I left, and had done it without pay.

Twelve

## Chapter 11

# Kathy

Jack and I went with Justine and Junior to the renewal of marriage vows of our nephew on Memorial Day. After the trip to Indiana, we visited four cemeteries. Although we were only five miles from Ormeda's, we did not see her. Jack had decorated our daughter's grave and we didn't think it was necessary.

Jack was feeling better, not completely healed. Recuperation was taking trust and patience.

Jack called Basil. Basil told him Helen could not stay longer than four hours. He would leave when school was out and Debbie could take over. He said Ormeda had been signing checks for Debbie all along.

Jack talked to his mother on the phone. Betty was coming in June 11th, flying from Colorado. She asked Jack when he was coming home.

Jack answered, "I am home."

"Isn't this your home?"

"I'm torn between two homes."

Jack told me he definitely would not go home while Betty was there.

Justine and Junior arrived at our home for a three day visit. They would take the black sports car Ray had sold them for their granddaughter home with them.

June 5th and 8th were Junior and Jack's birthdays. June 5th, Junior's birthday, the men went fishing on Lake Erie. Justine and I fixed T-bone steak dinner with birthday cake and ice cream. Junior got sick from the waves of Lake Erie, and couldn't eat. We gave each a roll of "You know you're over 50" toilet tissue. We sang "Happy Birthday" to them. Junior was 64 and Jack would be 63.

Second surprise, Betty looked at her office calendar and remembered it was Jack's birthday. She called. As I listened, I knew Jack again was betraying me with a confidential. I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

"Mom sent Lesa ten dollars for graduation. Her mother said it was almost an insult. Not that she couldn't afford more. She usually sends one hundred dollars. Debbie could have reminded her. Of course, Debbie probably wants the money for Kurt a Harley-Davidson."

Eula had told me this, in confidence. I told Jack, and he blew it to Betty. Betty's main concern and topic of conversation was how some vulture, possibly an eagle, had attacked her dog and the vet put one hundred stitches in the dog's back. Jack made fun of how much a dog can mean to some people

Jack and Ray went to a movie to celebrate Jack's birthday. It was raining and I watched soaps. I was beginning to worry about my health. My attitude about getting well was negative. For eight years I'd suffered, the doctor diagnosing too much acid. Side effects to the medicine he prescribed scared me.

Early in the morning on June 11th, Ormeda called. They had no gas. They always came to Jack even though he was miles away. Jack told her to check the gas lines and valves and then call the gas man and get the job done.

After five, when phone rates were cheaper, Jack called back. Betty answered. She said there had been a slip and a section of pipe had been pushed. The gas people turned off the gas until they could repair the pipe the next day. Jack was too busy to go down. He was painting a hundred year old iron bed white, decorating it with pink roses and would take it to his granddaughter when we traveled to Seattle in August.

Jack called the farm to see if Kathy was there. She wasn't. The longer the conversation between Betty and Jack went, the snappier it became. Betty had made arrangements for Helen's daughter to spend some nights with Ormeda.

"The only way I will take care of Ormeda is to have complete Power of Attorney. There are too many chiefs and not enough Indians."

"You'll never get that." Betty retorted.

"Getting things all together?"

"Not hardly."

She would return to Colorado tomorrow. Jack and Gene would be fishing.

At her home, Kathy answered the phone. Their son had passed first grade. Proud, I thought.

"Are you going to help with the reunion?" I asked.

"Yes, I thought I would. Rebecca won't be able to help. She and her husband separated. He got part time visitation rights, Friday to Sunday. He would be taking care of Linney. She won't leave."

"Do you feel comfortable in asking Debbie for the reunion money? If not, I will. I know Jack won't want to do it."

"No, I'll do it." "Did you get to see Betty?"

"I didn't want to. I didn't want to get in the middle of things but we went over to work in the garden and she came while we were there."

"How's Ormeda?"

"Betty and she were going to the courthouse to deed the "schoolhouse" to Debbie, when Grandma sprang her ankle. Basil said the deed wouldn't be legal. He said she couldn't get it done until Jack and us four girls agreed. It seems the "schoolhouse" was signed over to dad when he and mom got a divorce. Basil is suppose to find the paper. I don't understand why Uncle Jack has to sign it."

"Well, I do. They think all of you will agree but they don't know about Jack. This would be the part your grand dad left." Later, I found out I did not understand it all.

“I’ll tell you one thing. They’ll pay dear for my part. Basil quit Tuesday. He told Betty and Ormeda he wouldn’t let Debbie dictate his life any more. Debbie was to be there from one to dark and wasn’t. Basil said he wasn’t taking anyone’s side, but you have to see it to believe it, and he saw it now. Jennifer is going to camp for two weeks. Debbie told grandma seventy-five dollars would be enough. Instead she spent two hundred fifty dollars on four bags of stuff. If I ever asked grandma for anything, she’d say, ‘I’m broke’. My kids suffer because of Debbie’s kids. I can’t forget how she refused my kids cookies and when Debbie’s kids came, she told them, ‘There’s cookies in the cupboard’.

“Debbie drinks all the time. Dope goes through their house like candy.”

Of all my suspicions about Debbie, this was not one of them. Drinks? Dope? I did not want to believe it, but then how could I not believe Kathy? With Jack’s inability to keep secrets, should I tell him? I was a nervous wreck. I told Jack. Kathy thought if Debbie didn’t get the “schoolhouse”, Ormeda would deed her the farm house.

Kathy and I ended the conversation with agreement she would have the children’s games for the reunion. She told me about her new car, a red Chevy Cavalier.

Jack asked, “What is it I’m not to tell?”

“Kathy said not to tell Basil was looking for that paper and I don’t think you should mention the dope. We have no proof and it would be betraying Kathy.” Jack agreed, but I wondered if he would remember when he got in the boat with Gene tomorrow.

“There are four people I don’t want to betray: Lorna, Helen, Basil and Kathy.” Jack understood. They had been true friends.

Thirteen

## Chapter 12

# A Letter to Betty

My neighbor and I went to a restaurant to eat. We went for a drive in the park. The temperature was soaring and it was refreshing to drive among the green trees and smell the fresh air. When we got home, Jack was there with his catch, half the limit since he shared with Gene. Gene had said, “Let Debbie have the schoolhouse.” This was easy for them, since they had made the break from the farm and had no intentions of returning. More and more, Jack and I were feeling this way.

When I awoke the thought was in my mind to write Betty., even the exact words I should write. Without sharing this with Jack, I began writing.

June 16, 1990

I’m writing not because I want Jack to have Power of Attorney but because Jack had never explained this. I want Jack to be better understood. Jack loves his mother very much and would do what his mother wants. He is not against her helping Debbie, if that is what Ormeda wants. He is against anyone pulling out from under Ormeda what is hers. When Jack suggested Power of Attorney it was because he wanted to make the house safer and better for her, namely, to get rid of the gas fumes and jack up the kitchen floor and do things on the farm. He did not think he could just vegetate. Jack had no secret motives and is not looking out for Jack, but had your mother’s welfare and comfort in mind.

Jack is unaware I have written this. Am I being deceitful? I’ve tried to be uninvolved since Max and Jack had their misunderstanding. I thought it was right you knew Jack’s real intentions, tho, so I guess now I am involved.

Just hoping this builds a bridge of understanding— Lenore.

I mailed the letter. I wished I hadn’t. I hoped, since I mailed it to an old address, it would be returned. I began to see how in trying to help her understand Jack, I had left myself open to be accused of using psychology to get Jack Power of Attorney. Why had I acted so hastily?

Jack made the decision to sell his boat and fishing gear. He called Gene. He asked \$3,500-. Gene told him his mother was going to write a new will “because Jack wouldn’t let her have the other one. “

Jack had kept the will for his mother because he didn’t want the four girls to

see it and be hurt because they had been disinherited. He thought they might burn it, too.

He dialed his mother. "Be Christian", I said with tears in my eyes.

As usual Jack was calm when he talked to his mother. "I didn't know you wanted your will. I don't think you want Debbie to see it since you disinherited her. That is the reason I haven't sent it to you. Remember, the old man at the end of the bridge told you if the will was in your handwriting, that's all you needed. In the will, Max and I are the administrators, but we need approval for any costs from Betty and Gene. You mentioned Betty's first husband. He is not in the will. It was written in 1981. I'll mail the will to Basil's address and he can give it to you."

When Jack began to get the will ready to mail, I suggested he get a copy of it. He said that was a good idea.

I wondered if my note to Betty made a change in the plans. Was she getting scared? I told Jack I wrote a note to his sister. Only comment, "Are you glad?" Jack never knew what I wrote in the note and Betty never acknowledged she received it.

Jack got a copy of the will and mailed the original to Basil.

Fourteen

## Chapter 13

# Facing the Facts

Gene and Eula came to visit on their twenty-eighth wedding anniversary.

Gene said to me, "Why are you so greedy?" This made me angry. Jack had never let me forget my brother said he was greedy when we were settling my aunt's will. Now his brother was saying it to me.

"I'll tell you why. It goes deep, to love and acceptance. I've been through this. If you're left out, it's rejection. Bob told me with tears in his eyes, I could leave everything to Ray, but don't you think he would feel rejection if I did? How would you like to get one dollar so you won't contest the will? Of course, I had a dream of building a retirement home with three large rooms and bath on the hill."

"So you could look down on all of us?"

This made me furious. If this was the way he felt, yes, so I could look down on them. I only thought of looking out over the hills and trees. Never once had Ormeda mentioned that Jack and I build a house on the farm property. She always said I had the right place to build, meaning my mother's home in Sand Fork. She always said if I sold it, she'd like to buy it.

"She always wants to buy everything," Gene said with a giggle.

"Jack and I would never spend sixty thousand dollars and build a home at Sand Fork because Bob would never move back and Ray could never live there because of allergies. Anyway, I'm sixty-five, too old for that."

"I don't know. You look healthy."

"It would be a waste, anyway," Eula said.

"I'll die right here," Jack decided.

"This is comfortable enough."

I wanted Gene to understand. "Ormeda told me a long time ago I was left out. She explained it after Betty and Junior got their divorces. She was kind and apologetic. She put per-streps in her will so that it would go to Jack and the boys and I would be by-passed. The only way I could get it would be if Jack died and willed it to me." Jack spoke quickly. "And everything I have goes to Lenore." This is what bothered them, especially Ormeda.

They left for home. I was not greedy. I had given freely to Jack's family. I was not a snob. The visit had not been a pleasant one. I told Jack I would like to get in the house and stay away from everyone. When Jack wanted to confront Gene about it, I said, "Let it pass. I wish you hadn't told Gene our net worth."

"He has fifteen years to get it," which was true because Gene was fifteen years younger than Jack.

Fifteen

## Chapter 14

### Cousins

Helen was Jack's double-first cousin that lived in Florida. They were the same age and grew up like brother and sister. Jack liked Helen a lot. She wrote Jack.

"Betty called me for my birthday. She said she was going to West Virginia. She talked about the eagle grabbing her dog. I called while she was in West Virginia and talked to her and Aunt Ormeda. I hope you work out your differences and I am sure she does too. I know it is none of my business, but life is too short to cut yourself off from family. I guess I think you should feel pretty lucky to have a parent, brothers, and sister, and kids to differ with. Not all of us do, you know. Well, enough of meddling."

"Mean, mean, mean," was the words Jack used when he described his mother to Helen on the phone. He gave Helen Bob's address as requested. Then the talk drifted to family differences.

"Mom is spiteful and gave Dad one hell of a road to go." His wrath had surfaced.

The siding company called. "We've called five states to try to match the color of your vinyl siding. Can't find it anywhere."

"I have two extra lengths in the garage. All right, for sixty-five dollars you can repair the house." Jack had taken care of it.

Kathy and her family arrived for a visit and to go to Sea World. Jack and I would go to the wedding of Ray's friend, while they were at Sea World. Ray, as Best Man, looked handsome in a tuxedo, blue tie and cummerbund and corsage. He was a natural, the D J experience making it easy for him.

When Jack and I returned home, Kathy and the family were home from Sea World. Everyone was asleep except Kathy. Jack went to bed. Kathy and I skipped from subject to subject as we talked. It became evident the hardships she had in her life after her father and mother divorced and they moved in with Ormeda. Then her father was killed on the tractor. Her coach helped her out in high school when she began drinking. I also recognized the discrimination she felt when Ormeda chose Debbie's girls over her children.

"Debbie ended with everything when Dad got killed. She even got Dad's car. It was to be mine, since I had bought tires for it."

“Try to overcome all this. You are so young and pretty. Have your teeth repaired. That will make you even prettier and help you get rid of that nasal sounding speech. I know Ormeda paid for Debbie and Kurt to have their teeth repaired. That must hurt. She should and could pay for yours, but won’t. Do it on your own.”

I went to bed with compassion for Kathy, and disgust for what she had endured.

The next day, the men returned early from fishing. Kathy’s husband was sick. They left for home, with goodies I’d given them to eat as they traveled.

## Chapter 15

# Dogs in Their Place

It was our forty-first wedding anniversary July 2, 1990 that Jack found out Ormeda had received the will. The lawyer, Mr. Lutheran, told her to let it go to probate. Jack said to be sure the will was destroyed then.

Ormeda could not get it out of her head we were not in Florida. Now she was saying Ray told her that, and that was the reason we had left. Jack assured her again the reason we left was that Max had “jumped on him”. If we had of been going to Florida, our minds had been changed when she fell in the tub. We went to Florida only after the blow-up.

“My visit on Mother’s Day, I broke my words when I said I’d never darken your door. I spoke these when I was angry and out of control. Yes, I’m hurt deeply, and maybe someday, not now, I will get over it. I am praying about it.”

“You know you are the one that comes to my mind if I want stable advice.” Jack was elated.

Jack was holding on to the fact certain conditions would have to be met before he ’d return to care for his mother, and I knew that is what he wanted to do and it was killing him. I wondered how long he’d hold on and where I’d fit in. We never talked it through to a complete understanding.

Basil said to me on the phone, “I hate Debbie more every day. Jack was right.” We discussed his trip to Baltimore to learn hand-gliding and the Bible.

“I’ll pray for you about hand-gliding. I don’t think this is the thing for you to do at this age and time. God gives us a brain and expects us to use it.” We laughed. “Jack will call when he awakes.”

“Piss on it. I don’t want to talk now. I hear more about Helen and Betty’s dogs than I do my grandchildren. Put them to sleep if they’re in pain. I’m still having a hard time. I don’t holler about it all the time. I take nitroglycerine by prescription. Don’t go to doctors anymore. Got prostate done, haven’t seen one since. You and Betty take care of everything. See you the fourteenth.”

I knew from what I heard Ormeda said Betty would be the administrator of her will. Thoughts flashed through my mind. Jack was the oldest. Jack had taken care of his mother when Betty went back to Colorado. Jack was knowledgeable, but Jack and Max had fallen out. I thought of his health, his

self-image, stress, the hurt, the deceit, and knew I could say nothing to him that would help.

When it was safe to talk, I put my hand on Jack's arm. "Don't let it do to you what it did to my brother. Let us learn from all this. From this day on, no matter what one of our sons may do, let's not hurt them."

"Yea, we've got a ways to go, eh?"

"Kathy said what Betty wanted, she would get." Jack did not want to hear this..

"I said I'd never darken her door again. Maybe she has a right to do this. It's too late anyway." Jack reasoned. "Basil said Debbie is trying to turn everyone against me."

"Who's everyone? She can't turn Basil, Lorna, Cliff and your aunt against you. Maybe your mother and Betty."

Jack smiled, turned off the TV and went to bed.

July 6, 1990, Ray was twenty six. We ate at Chi Chi's, Ray refusing to let us tell the waitresses it was his birthday. After cake and ice cream at home, he was off to DJ.

Seventeen

## Chapter 16

# Lenore Returns

I ran across the street to share with Molly our plans for the reunion . When I returned, Jack was on the phone to Betty. Jack's face was flushed. He had called about a check he had received. Even though it was Ormeda's money, he thought Betty and he should be paid lawyer fees since Ormeda had paid Max and Gene's, and it should come out of this money. Betty was unaware of what had happened, and said she'd never been paid. Jack told me Betty had Power of Attorney. When? How long? Why had she kept it from the rest of the family? She sneaked this over on all of us.

Jack and I pretended to watch TV. We sat at the dining room table a long time, "Jack, how are you feeling?"

"I feel sorry for Mom. She let this whole thing get out of control. Helen said she is staring into space."

"When we go down, we'd better take the attitude everything will be all right, be positive."

Angrily Jack verbally attacked me. "Be my partner, not my minister. You know what I mean. I love you, and I love my boys. Sometimes I may even be nasty with you, but I still love you. You're all I've got."

Talking to Jack was difficult. Thoughts were better left unsaid. Each idea came to a dead end.

"Let Max and Betty take care of her, but if it gets so bad they can't, then I will. I'll never let her go in a nursing home." Jack went to bed. Ray came home late from work. Tomorrow Jack would mail the check to be deposited in Ormeda's account. He had his name on the check. He would not take the lawyer fees he mentioned to Betty, not yet.

The sun streaming through the venetian blinds in our bedroom awoke us early. The bacon and toast for breakfast was a good beginning for the day. At the table, Jack said to me, "I was awake most of the night thinking. I prayed. I thought about how God gave His Son for our sins and I began to see how insignificant this one little part of my life is. I began to think of your love, and the boys, and my mother's, and Betty's and even Max's, how Betty helped Bob get into college and Max helped Ray get a job." We finished eating and took

Ray a burger, fries, and allergy medicine at work.

Seven months later, seven months of pain, and Jack and I were going back together, first to the reunion, then to say "Hello" to his mother, and on to the cabin. Packing was a chore. We packed things for the cabin first, then the reunion supplies. He had the four-wheeler and lawn mower on the newly painted white and blue trailer. I was good at organization. I had not expected a visit from Jack's childhood friend.

A certified letter from Debbie arrived, postage due, thirty cents. She had paid two dollars. Inside was a check for seventy-five dollars with a memo: Auction money from Marks's Reunion on 7-8-89, minus reservation for pavilion, in full. It was a half dollar more than was due. "Return receipt requested" was on the outside of the envelope. Jack had a photo-copy of the check and envelope made and returned it to her. It arrived in time for the reunion.

Rain, and more rain. We knew attendance at the reunion would be small. It was. Food, games, visiting, prizes. Debbie and Max's families were not there. Eula and I talked briefly.

Jack and I arrived at the farm. I walked slowly up the narrow sidewalk, this time not snow-covered and icy. I entered the side door, and walked to the living room. ORMEDA! Seven months of sharing hurt and sorrow. I walked toward her, so tiny, pale, thinner, dark circles under her big eyes, sitting on the sofa she had never deserted. The sun shone on her clean, grayish hair and it glistened. I put out my hand and touched hers.

"Hello", and she was staring me straight in the eye.

"Hello," she answered.

A stranger in the room gave her chair to me. I sat down. She went to get a chair for Jack.

Dreama was a fill-in to take care of Ormeda when others were not available. I guessed she was in her late forties. She was wearing shorts and a pink top, very attractive. Jack sat facing his mother talking, and Dreama began sharing with me information about her home, her family and her reunion. As Jack and I were leaving, I told Ormeda we would be back in five days, and I'd see her. I was sorry I had not talked to Ormeda more, but hoped she and Jack had talked. I said good-bye to Gene and Eula, who were visiting.

I hurriedly cleaned the cabin, heated left overs, and put clean linens on the bed. Hunter, Jack's friend, was spending the night. The day started at four A. M., the drive was long, and the reunion was over.

Rain pounded the tin roof. Just when you thought it couldn't rain any more, down the rain came with more and more force, each sound of the raindrop magnified as it hit the tin.

Jack got the bug zapper. Three of us sat at the cabin, back up in the holler, all lights out, listening to the rain and watching the zapper snip out the lives of hundreds of insects that invaded the cabin through the cracks. Very late, we went to bed.

Sunday, Hunter, Jack and I arrived at the small country church across the meadow from the farm house. I dreaded this return. We entered. Members of the congregation stood around talking. I stood behind Lorna, waiting for her

to finish her conversation. Cliff's eye caught mine and he smiled. I appreciated that! Lorna sensed my presence and turned. We hugged. The dread was gone. Others greeted us, and Jack introduced Hunter. I chose to sit by a little old lady I admired. Jack and Hunter sat together. Jack's cousin taught the adult class. We were accepted.

Church ended. Outside, we looked over the hill. Muddy, rushing water had changed the creek to a river. We could not get across to Ormeda's or back to the cabin. Lorna invited us to dinner with them. Gene and Eula had luckily left early for Ohio.

Lorna served chicken, dressing, corn, peas and green beans fresh from the garden. I knew as I talked I should be censoring my conversation more than I was. The Sunday School lesson had been about taking care of your own household first. I kept confidence with the source of what I was saying. Betty had called Lorna and Helen, Jack's cousins, and wanted to know the best way to deal with Jack. This made Lorna feel an equal, since she said Betty and Helen had always considered her the poor, ignorant cousin from back in the holler. I did not know Lorna had been unaccepted by them. I did know Jack had been the scapegoat for his family. I knew now Lorna had equalled and even surpassed Betty and Helen in education, community service, Christian leadership, and respect. At five o'clock, we could cross the creek.

"Thank you for your support. The more I know you, the more I love you," I told Lorna, and that was exactly how I felt.

"I love you, too." I learned Lorna had something I wish I could develop, the ability to take control of a situation, and to be direct and firm.

Jack and Hunter went to check the creek to see if Hunter's small car could get across. I was alone with Ormeda. I moved next to her on the sofa, so she could hear me.

"Maybe you can hear me better here," I said.

"I wish this could've waited a while until I was dead," she said.

Trying to encourage, I said, "Jack and Max will get over this. I tried to keep the promise I made you in the kitchen to keep in touch with you. That's why I wrote you from France. Since this is Jack's family, I try to let him take the lead. Melba and I could hear something going on and Melba said Max could be a hot head and I knew Jack could be, too. That's when Melba and I hugged, and I said, 'Melba, you're married to Max and I'm married to Jack. You stay with Max and I'll stay with Jack'. I could tell you what I think, Ormeda, but I would be putting in my own feelings, emotions and interpretations and that would be wrong. You need to hear Max's side and Jack's side."

"Say that again," she said and I repeated the latter part.

"Jack said he would not see me alive again, he'd see me in my coffin and I told him not to come to the funeral then." A little smile crossed her face that seemed to say, "I outsmarted him". I did not remember her ever saying Jack should not come to her funeral.

"Basil caused this," she added. I couldn't believe this. Was she confusing names as she was doing more and more often.

“Ormeda, Basil was kind. He helped Jack load the four-wheeler. He told Jack he didn’t want them to end like he and his brother, and we departed saying ‘I love you’ to each other. Jack thought Debbie was taking money.”

“Debbie never took a cent from me,” she answered in the curt way she had of saying things.

I knew I was treading on dangerous ground. “I mean when she bought groceries, buying her own, too.”

“I told her to do it. I told her never to go hungry, if she was out to buy something to eat.”

“I can name five people that thinks Debbie is taking from you.” How was I so brave?

Jack and Hunter entered. He was not going to try to cross the creek. They got into a heated discussion about blacks and their place in society. Later he checked the creek, and was on his way home to Florida.

Jack and I returned to the cabin and ate hamburgers. Then Jack was gone on the four-wheeler to visit his mother. I knew Dreama would be there. Dreama had said to me, “Someone doesn’t come four hours a day and not clean the stove, refrigerator, and cabinets. It took a box of Brillo for me to clean the stove.” Was this competition between Helen and Dreama beginning?

“Helen has her hands full cooking, cleaning, and taking care of Ormeda.” I tried to defend Helen. I knew Helen had been there longer and Ormeda valued her presence.

Jack and I worked hard. He borrowed a tractor and spread piles of dirt at the property at Sand Fork. We fertilized and planted grass seed. I put a West Virginia sign the City of Cleveland had given Jack for retirement on the side of the hill. I planted ivy in my rock garden.

Every bug in the holler was drawn to the cabin windows at night, and were having a free-for- all. The moths were too large for the zapper, so they parked on the outside of the zapper, on the cabin, and covered the picture window. Hundreds of them struggled to survive when I used bug spray. In many colors and sizes, what a collection. I was ready to go home.

How much should I believe of what I heard? What I heard bothered me. Rebecca was on ”grass”. Dreama and her husband grew marijuana and marketed it in Ohio where he worked. Dreama’s son had been on marijuana and was in jail for six years for armed burglary in another state. There was no way he could be paroled because Tennessee would get him for breaking parole after they let him go. Dreama talked calmly, but I knew she was hurting. Ormeda had given Jennifer money for 4-H Camp, but so had three other people, each not knowing the other was giving.

Jack and I visited Ormeda and Basil. Debbie entered and stood behind Jack in such a way Jack could not see her.

“Let’s go,” Jack said as soon as he saw her. Debbie, the center of all the controversy, seemed to be patrolling the farm. Ormeda had a look of disbelief as Jack and I left. That night we played cards with his cousins, to escape the bugs at the window.

The next morning, I thanked Basil for walking down to the car with us when Debbie entered. He said, "She came through the house with that smirky grin she gets. Don't let her run you out of your own home, Jack." I knew Basil was right, and so did Jack.

Ormeda told me the reason Debbie had come was to get Rebecca's trust money. Ormeda said, "Not until she's twenty-five. Then I'll give it to her and she can spend it for anything, or burn it if she wants to." If Rebecca was on grass and her husband was waiting for that money, Ormeda had done the right thing.

Jack told me, "I got hyper with Mom. I shouldn't get hyper with her. I told her how I had been kicked down the steps by her and how dad had belted me. She said she'd take her cane and start all over again, if I kept on, teasing me. I told her she wouldn't believe me then and she won't believe me now. I told her how Betty had told Max about me calling Jennifer a bastard. She wouldn't believe me when I told her Max had called me a son-of-a-bitch that day, right here in the living room. You heard him, didn't you?"

"No, Jack, you told me about it."

Jack went on. "I said Debbie was a thief and she said she wasn't. With you and Basil I was between a rock and a hard place. I told Basil I would stay with Mom until he went home and got a bath, and I knew you'd be mad at me for staying so long." I had become mad but after listening was glad my work at the cabin had kept me there.

A group of us were standing at the parked cars in front of the farm house. Dreama and I were talking. Debbie, as usual, made her appearance, in the car with Jennifer and Misty. Dreama and I continued talking. I had my back to Debbie.

I heard Jack say, "Hi, young lady" to Jennifer and "Hi, Misty." To my surprise, Jennifer came over and hugged me. Then they went to the house. For the first time, I felt sorry for Kurt and Debbie. He brought the Gravely back to Ormeda. He had a cap over his long, black hair, his thin body was slightly stooped, and he passed all of us, speaking to no one. Debbie looked tired, no make-up, and unkept. She seemed pleased when Jack asked her to find a bank deposit slip. She told Basil, "Uncle Jack spoke to me."

Eighteen

## Chapter 17

# Between Fights

A lot of preparation went into dinner. Kathy served steak, potatoes, salad, fresh green beans and her own special cheese cake with cherries on top. Kathy and I, again, had a chance to talk privately. I explained my version of the dispute between Max and Jack, including the oil investments as a possible source of conflict within Max.

Kathy said, “Debbie is working for her husband’s brother in a pawn shop. Rebecca is mad . Kurt said she got what she deserved when her husband took the baby for three days and wouldn’t let her know where she was. Rebecca, to get even, threatened to tell Jennifer was a bastard.”

Would this hurt Kurt or Jennifer?

“Debbie said she wrote checks for Ormeda’s care for \$420- for two weeks, and \$126 for Helen’s daughter. Do you think, Aunt Lenore, Dreama could work that much overtime? Max said he and Betty were “paying through the nose” to take care of Grandma.”

I did not know Max had anything to do with this.

“Rebecca was mad again. Max told her she would never get her trust fund, about thirty seven thousand dollars, that it would go to whoever got the baby.”

“If I were Rebecca, I’d go to the bank and check out the wording for the trust fund. I think she should do this for her own security and knowledge.” I, too, was upset.

“Whoever gets the baby, gets the welfare payments.” My head went in a twirl.

“Betty is writing Ormeda to hurry if she wants to do something for Debbie.” I didn’t know Betty was working with her mother to do for Debbie. I understood Kathy’s feeling of being excluded.

The children came home from Bible School and I went with them to play Nintendo games. At bedtime, we left for the cabin.

Next morning, I looked out the window. There was Basil in his pick-up truck. I screamed. I was washing dishes in my pants and bra. I ran into the bedroom to dress. Jack took him upstairs to see the two bedrooms. I remembered I had

cleaned them.

The three of us were outside leaning on the truck talking. "Ormeda likes Eula better than you," Basil said. Interesting, I thought. Basil drove off down the dusty road.

After five days of hard work in hot weather, we loaded the van to go home. We stopped at Ormeda's. Helen had just taken a pan of corn bread out of the oven "to get it baked before it gets hot". I stayed in the kitchen. Jack went to talk to his mother. Helen, very conveniently, sat in a chair in the doorway so she could hear what Jack said. Jack's loud voice could easily be heard.

"Mama, I don't lie. Lenore and I had planned to stay with you. What Ray said was before you were hurt. I didn't go anywhere for five weeks in case you called and asked for me to come back. My clothes have been packed since that day. I waited for a call. I hurt and hurt and hurt some more. Rebecca heard she wouldn't get her trust if she didn't get the baby." Another time Jack was repeating what I had told him in confidence. It made me feel like I betrayed Kathy.

"Where's Lenore?" Changing the subject had become a way for Ormeda to handle the situation.

"She's in the kitchen with Helen."

I went into where Ormeda sat on the sofa. I touched her knee. "You have a few problems right now, but everything will work out all right," I felt sorry for her.

"More than just a few"

"You've got good help." Helen was now standing in the doorway. I turned. She met me and we hugged.

Jack leaned over and hugged his mother and said, "I love you". I left first and knew I must keep going so my tears could flow unknowingly to anyone. Jack followed. I heard someone say, "Good-bye. Come back."

I answered, "I will."

Outside the gate, I turned to Jack. "You, too," he said, and we each shed tears no one knew except us. Our hearts were being shredded little by little, and only we knew.

At home, we began working to be ready for a friend I met in Marileeland when I was only twenty. Fondly, I remembered how she sang "Because", "Ah, Sweet Mystery of Life", and "I Love You Truly", at our wedding. I had been a bridesmaid at her wedding and we had never seen each other since.

Ruth was as pretty as I remembered. She was petite in comparison to myself, blue eyed and spoke in a soft southern accent. Words showed her love for teaching, and she had no plans to retire, even though she took insulin for diabetes. The three day visit with Ruth, her husband and sister was what Jack and I needed to escape what was happening in his family.

Jack and I were alone again. All hell broke loose. As usual, I could not remember what events led up to what happened.

"I'm no longer going to be the compatible, easy-to-get along with person you know. I will embarrass you in front of people like you do me." He had just returned from a movie with Ray and had been so obnoxious in front of my

friend, Molly, I ask her to go for a walk to get away from him. When Jack and I went to bed, there was a lot of anger between us.

The next morning he came toward me, we hugged, and he said, "I've been bad". Each of us began work. The anger had not vanished. It flared up again at eight o'clock, time for the evening movies, when I wanted to watch a program with a singer from West Virginia on it. He let me watch it, but he was in the kitchen singing and yodeling so loudly I could not hear. Molly, from across the street heard him and called to see why he was so happy.

"He's punishing me." She could hear him cussing and singing.

"Why don't you come over?"

"I'm in my nightgown and shampooing my hair. I can't." I almost cried but made up my mind if he ever treated me like this again, I'd call the police. I'd taken abuse and this was enough. I knew he'd never go for counseling and I knew I'd never call the police. I had too much pride.

I wrote thank you notes to Kathy and Lorna and went to bed.

"WAH! HOO! WAH! HOO, oh how he cried each time that the tide washed our love letters from the sand. On a hill far away, stood an old rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame." Jack was awake and was continuing his sadistic torture. I faked being asleep. When he changed to "The Old Rugged Cross" he became aware of what he was doing. He left the bedroom and I went back to sleep.

When I got up, without a word being said, I ate, dressed and left in the car to get my hair done. It was four hours before I returned. While I was gone, Jack called Molly and apologized.

The third day was the same. I knew I had to break the silence barrier to make plans for our friends from Marileeland that were coming to visit at the cabin. I would not hurt them for anything.

"I want to see Mom again before we go West. She says she's not doing well." That settled it. I'd do my best. Alesia, a Christian I met when I went to Marileeland to teach as a young girl, had lived a gentle life, and I was not sure how she would accept the ruggedness of our cabin life.

"Jack, we both have been down the past few days. I think it was the Chinese food. Let's take it from there and go on." I had to do this for Alesia and Jack. After all, he had said I was the only friend he had left, and he was about to lose me.

"Thank you." Jack seemed encouraged the anger of the past few days was behind us.

This time our visit to the cabin was to celebrate my sixty-fifth birthday with dear friends. Jack and I went a day early.

Dreama told me, "It would be nice if Jack and you stayed with Ormeda." I sat in the upstairs bedroom of the cabin, the sun streaming through the window, thinking about this.

Yes, this would be nice. How much did she know? Did she understand we couldn't stay with Ormeda, even though Debbie wasn't doing her job.? Did she understand I could not take her food and how much I appreciated the chicken

casserole she would bring to Ormeda for the week end? Did she understand we could not change what had been set up by Betty?

Later, I met Basil in the front yard. We talked about the lichen on the apple tree. Then I visited Ormeda. I had learned to sit on the right side and talk into her “good” ear and speak loudly. The fan was blowing smoke from her cigarette into my face.

“Max has a new grandson? I like his name. Sounds sturdy. Mom always said a boy’s name should be strong so if it was ever on a shingle as a lawyer or doctor it would sound right.” I knew Ormeda had a lot of respect for my mother.

“Max sold his house for sixty-nine thousand dollars, lost two thousand. He worked two weeks to paint, inside and out. He put out a sign, “No Renters Wanted”. The renters had damaged his property a lot.”

“Are they buying a house in Florida?”

“Yes, they pay two hundred dollars a month for rent.” I knew there was something wrong with that figure.

Ormeda was controlling the conversation and leading into the new subjects now. I was alert as to what would come next.

“Betty has Power of Attorney and will administer the will. I ask Betty three questions and told her to answer ‘Yes’ or ‘No’. Did she want the job of doing this? Yes. Did Paul want her to take the job? Yes. Did she want small amounts of money to be included, such as cutting the hay? Yes. She told me to make a list of things and give it to Debbie and she would honor it. I want Jennifer to have my history books and ledger from my dad’s old store and grist mill.”

Thoughts raced through my head. Right here, Betty could have said she thought one of the boys should do this, even Jack, the oldest, retired with time, and knowledgeable.

“You know anyone with Power of Attorney must keep good books. They can be challenged.”

“Yes, I know. I got mad at Kathy and her husband the other day. They were against our ex- governor. I know he’s on trial for extortion, tax invasion and fraud and possibly faces a jail sentence, but I think it was all a set-up. They’re trying to send him to Alabama to jail and he wanted to go to Kentucky.”

“I haven’t kept up with it, Ormeda. In Ohio, they give very little West Virginia news.”

“I told Kathy to get out. Kathy was my favorite niece until she said this.” I doubted this.

“Ormeda, every family has conflict. Love overcomes conflict, and especially in families. I know Kathy was hurt because Debbie got her dad’s car. She had bought new tires for it and I understand Debbie didn’t take care of it after she got it.”

Ormeda gave me a look that said, “How did you know that?”

“There’s a lot of hurt over what I give Debbie. She never took a cent.” Was she wanting my opinion, approval, or what on all this?

Gently, I was brave enough to say, “Ormeda, I have reason to believe differently. I may be wrong but I’ll tell you why. Once, Debbie and I went grocery

shopping with a signed check from you. She brought a few groceries up to you and left hers in the van. Another time she bought big bags of cat and dog food with the check signed by you.”

“I don’t want her to go hungry.” But it was all right to steal, like her mother had taught her?

“I know. Our motherly instincts likes for us to help those we love and for them to have better than we. We have to be careful in helping that we don’t make it easy for them to do wrong things, such as drugs and alcohol. Those were big bags of cat and dog food,” and I measured with my hands.

“Ray’s a good boy.”

“Yes, I’ve been blessed with two good boys, and we try to do equally for both.”

I left for the cabin. She still did not understand why we had judged Debbie the way we had.

Nineteen

## Chapter 18

# Friends

Friday, August 3rd, 1990 and I was sixty-five. I was old enough for Medicare, and that made me feel old.

I awoke early, dressed and ate a quick breakfast. We hurriedly left to meet Alesia and Willie at the Seventy-Niner Restaurant to show them the way to the cabin. Alesia greeted me, "Hello, there," and Willie proudly by her side, put his arm around her. I rode in their car as we followed Jack to the cabin fifteen miles away. I showed them where I went to school, where our home burned when I was a girl, and Jack and I owned the property, and gave her a short history of my girlhood life.

At Ormeda's, I introduced Alesia and Willie. We went to the cabin for preparations for my birthday dinner. I was surprised Alesia had brought a tablecloth, candles, birthday cake, chicken, rice salad and green beans.

"Happy Birthday, Lenore," she said in a soft voice, and presented me with an initialed travelogue and Mountaineer book, both creatively wrapped with Alesia's expertise and special touch. We bowed our heads for the blessing and there in the crude cabin, by candlelight, I felt a special love and appreciation for my friends of forty years. I was not sure how they were accepting what they heard us talk about, home.

The next day we rode on the hills to see the oil wells and later had a picnic lunch in a state park. After church, Alesia and Willie stopped with us at Ormeda's. She gently rubbed Ormeda's back and said, "You'll be 86 and I'll be 68 in September, just turned around."

As they said good-by back at the main highway, I remembered how Jack and I had introduced them, one Christian to another. They fell in love and married.

Our visit was over, and I'd begin my sixty-fifth year. We stopped to see Ormeda before our trip home.

"Mama, I am honest. I intended to stay with you but was run out. I know Betty has Power of Attorney now and is in charge."

"If there is any bickering I will burn the house and the "schoolhouse"." More and more I saw threatening used in Jack's family to control. I hated threats.

Ormeda's small, fragile body relaxed in the arms of her oldest son, and Jack again said, "I love you."

"Take that blackberry pie in the freezer. Helen and I made it for Basil, but we'll make him another one." We started back home to Ray.

Twenty

## Chapter 19

# Travel in An RV

Jack called his mother to let her know we arrived home safely. She asked if he liked the blackberry pie. I told her we'd have to watch our money on our trip West, and she said she'd told Debbie they "were going to have to scratch for money, it was getting scarce".

Gene and Eula stopped to say goodbye.

Jack and I left Garfield Heights, Ohio , August 14, 1990 with my sister, Justine and her husband Junior for a trip around the United States. The huge RV towing a compact blue car was a luxury Jack and I could not afford. Junior drove and Jack occupied the front seat next to him. Justine and I sat on the sofa and chair opposite each other. We talked, walked around, fixed sandwiches and used the bathroom. This was a new way of travel for us. Coast to Coast campgrounds were chosen when possible. One night in Montana, we stayed at Glacier National Park. We went on a boat cruise to Mackinaw Island, Michigan, and toured the island in a horse drawn carriage. No motorized vehicles were allowed on the island. We cruised Lake Erie to see the Pictured Rocks National Park. We visited historic homes, homes of the rich and famous, toured copper mines, sifted rocks for sapphires, and crossed the Rocky Mountains. In the RV we traveled fourteen days through six states, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, Montana and Washington. We arrived at Bob's home a day early.

Monika swung open the door. She was wearing an aqua bathing suit and pink shoes with bows on them. Her blonde hair had been styled short for the bathing season. She hugged each of us, radiant and beaming.

"Come on. Oh, no, it's all right you're early. Everything's well, almost ready." We entered the foyer and looked upward to the five balcony rooms. On the right, we saw the huge living room, with tall thin windows and sky lights.

"Come on, I'll show you the house." We found Bob downstairs in the computer room working. He came toward us, hugged each, conscious we caught him unkept.

Each child, Marilee, Josh and Jeremiah, ran toward us and hugged us. Then they discovered Mac, the black poodle, our traveling companion to Jack's dislike.

Mac would stay in the RV and visitation would be allowed the children.

After pizza, we opened gifts that we'd transported across the United States: A painted toy chest from Justine, monogrammed pitcher and glasses, an insect box for each child, a musical box for Marilee and a presidential medallion set for the boys, and on top of the RV the white iron bed with pink roses painted by Jack for his granddaughter.

The men moved the water bed to a basement bedroom, then took the antique bed from the top of the RV and set it up in Marilee's room. Monika and I shopped for a mattress. This would have made Aunt Mollie proud.

We planned to stay two weeks. Nine of us went to church. Justine and Junior treated the children to an overnight camping trip in the RV. We picked blackberries for a cobbler. We visited Seattle Center for Bumpershoot, and the children took Mac for walk after walk. We swam in the pool and took turns in the hot tub.

"I've got a treat. It's a surprise. A professional massager is coming. We're each getting a massage. This is special from me. It'll be on Sunday."

Twenty-one

## Chapter 20

# George

George arrived, a small blue-eyed sixty-one year old man dressed in a suit. The massage table was set up in the master bedroom. After Jack it was my turn. I entered the room dressed in white shorts and peach top. I lay on the table. He positioned himself at my feet, and grasping my feet with his hands, bowed his head and prayed, asking God's blessing on his hands that they be a blessing to me. He massaged each toe, my feet and legs, and talked as he worked. When I told him I was having trouble with a hiatal hernia, he asked, "Do you have much stress in your life?"

"Yes," I answered, thinking of Jack's heart and prostate surgery, the farm and the death of my brother.

As his hands moved, sometimes up and down, sometimes in circular motion, swift, soothing, and knowledgeable of his trade, he quoted scriptures that would help me handle stress. He would return for a second massage before we left.

Bob paid twelve dollars an hour for his services. Each of us agreed the massage made us feel better.

I was the first for a massage on his second visit five days later. I dressed in the same white shorts, but wore a shirt buttoned down the front. George prayed. He again massaged each toe, my feet and legs, talking incessantly, his hands like magic, moving rapidly, gracefully.

"This increases the flow of blood. You work with the inside, and I'll work from the outside. Avoid sugar, with your acid problem. Sugar creates acid."

"Do you think massaging my hiatal hernia would help? A doctor told me two years ago to massage it and showed me how."

"I'll try. I'd rather give you a complete massage and get your husband tomorrow than do half and half." This made sense to me.

I unbuttoned my blouse, exposing between my breast, and he began stroking gently from the top of my breast bone toward my stomach.

"If only this will help," I thought. I had suffered six years, burning, up-chucking, avoiding caffeine, chocolate, acid foods, dairy products, eating small amounts and taking anti acids and prescription medicines from doctors. Hope, hope, I had hope and I had given up.

George talked about how he got into the massage business, that he was licensed, had been in the massage business thirteen years, and most of his business was home calls. He pulled my blouse to the side and took my left breast in his hand and with circular motion began massaging.

Jack entered the room.

George was surprised. He covered my breast, but continued massaging my neck and behind my ears. Jack walked over to the window and looked out over the deck to the Seattle pines.

I said the fatal words. "You came at a bad time. We wish you would leave." I meant the massage was nearly over. Jack gave me a dirty look as he passed. George continued the massage and finished after doing the right breast. He would return tomorrow for Jack's massage.

Hell was waiting for me when I entered the family room. I could see unspoken anger in Jack's eyes, fury, hurt, revenge raging.

"Bitch." One by one people left until only Jack and I were there.

"Bitch! We want you to leave. We! Who the hell are you and George to tell me to leave? I'm your husband. Baby, you were taken advantage of."

"I thought he could help me," I said, almost crying. "For the first time in years, I had hope."

For the life of me, I felt no guilt. I had no sexual feelings with the massage.

"You'd never let me touch me and then you did this." Right now I knew Jack would never understand that when he touched me it was a sexual thing, and this wasn't, not for me, and I felt not for George. It was his job. I felt rejuvenated, and innocent. I felt no guilt, except I'd hurt Jack. I never wanted to hurt anyone, and yet it seemed more and more I was hurting people. Junior told Jack he'd be very upset if Justine had done what I did. I was not a whore, and I refused to be put in that category.

I started outside to the trampoline where Monika was. "Bitch, pig, I'll kill you and I'll kill him, too, if you ever let him lay hands on you again. You'd better not be here when he comes tomorrow."

Monika was startled, amazed, then frightened. She had never seen Jack so out of control. After she heard the second threat on my life she became concerned.

I escaped to the bedroom in the basement where Jack and I were sleeping in the water bed he and Junior had moved. Jack followed. As I started dressing for bed, he grabbed my bra and with his knife cut it in two pieces. He walked over to me.

"I've something to tell you." He flipped one of my breast and said, "From now on we'll call them George," and he flipped the other breast, "Porgy. George, Porgy, that's a good name for them." I ran upstairs and told Monika what had happened.

"You sleep up here." Monika and I talked for hours.

"Jack won't hurt me..." That night I slept with Jeremiah. I did not know Jack and Junior went to buy a gun and Junior talked him out of it.

Suddenly, I was aware of my breasts, more so than as a teenager. I was always modest, but became increasingly so.

Jack said, "I don't want to touch you. You're filthy," and then, "I don't love you anymore."

"My biggest wrong was in hurting you. I'm sorry. Forgive me."

"I want a divorce."

Bob was in the middle between his mother and father. It was his treat, his friend, and circumstances. I grabbed bits of information from Justine and Monika. Jack seemed to be everywhere trying to know what was happening.

Jack sobbed, sitting on the waterbed with his head in his hands. "I've hurt Bob. I didn't want to hurt Bob."

I had destroyed something that could never be regained, because of innocence and ignorance.

We left my son's home on Monday. Goodbyes were fake. We drove one hundred miles to Leisure Time Resort. Jack avoided me, occasionally getting close enough to say, "I'm catching the plane in Oregon." or "When I get home, I'm going to the Masonic home," or, "If it weren't for Junior, I'd catch the plane. He's one swell guy and I hate to leave him in the middle of the trip."

I did not know what Jack would do and made up my mind whatever he did was all right with me. I would not try to stop him.

We visited Mt. Rainier Hatcheries, saw the ruins of Mt. St. Helens and Mt. Rainier, and got to Oregon. Jack did not catch the plane in Oregon. We wondered if he would. He thought we had run off and left him at the campground when we discovered he wasn't with us and had to go back to get him. Junior explained and apologized.

Jack and I sat side by side in the RV. Tears were in our eyes. "I'm about to break," I said.

"Me, too."

We walked along the beach of the Pacific Ocean in Oregon. Jack took my hand in his. It was rough, not as I remembered it.

"Help me be good. I hurt Bob. I can never look him in the eye."

"Jack, you said God had thrown you out. God is always there. You have thrown God out. Junior on this trip has been reading about God. Think how you could share with him. One time I told Junior to pray and he said, 'My prayers aren't heard,' and I said, 'Yes. they are.'"

The stroll on the beach was long, little was said, and we watched the waves lap onto the sand and rocks.

Jack called his mother on September 20, 1990 She was eighty-seven. On the same day, Justine, Junior and I went to San Francisco. As we left, Jack said, with tears, "I love you."

We stood on the lawn of a nurse friend of Justine's in California.

"I feel all have lost respect for us." I said.

"I do, too." Jack agreed.

We traveled 7,7000 miles, spent \$1,400 on gasoline and had been gone two months and three days. What now, that Jack and I were home?

I called Monika. "Have you seen George? Does he know what happened?"

"He knew Jack was upset. He thought it was because he did not get his massage that day. He prayed for both of you."

Jack said, "I ruined the trip from Washington, on." I wanted to say, "You surely did."

Twenty-two

## Chapter 21

# The Aftermath

Justine and Junior promised they'd never tell what happened in Washington. Jack and I tried to blot it out of our minds. Bob and Monika were forgiving. Ray knew, and was kind.

Two weeks at home and Ormeda needed Jack. I would not go. Max had given a neighbor permission to use the meadow to pasture cattle. She did not want this.

"Mom's really disappointed you're not coming."

"That makes me happy. She cares for me." I knew that was immature at the age of sixty-five, but I wanted to be accepted, not as Jack's wife, but as Lenore.

"Turn on the light if you can't see," I called from the living room. It was Jack. He had returned from the farm a day early.

"It's you. I didn't expect you until tomorrow. How's your mother?"

"Mom's fine, probably better than I am. I talked with her neighbor. He wanted to do business on a handshake, said contracts made the innocent look guilty. I said, 'Hey, what if you die in January. I'd have to deal with your lawyers and handshakes don't make it'. After thinking a while he signed a liability contract for any personal property damage. I showed Debbie where the contract is."

"Was there any length to the time he could use the land?"

"No, but I told him if anything happens to Mom, he'll have four of us to deal with. He'll put an electric fence around the meadow."

"I wish there would have been a time limit to it.. How was Basil?"

"Basil's fine. I told Mom you sent the two bags of popcorn to Basil and the kids weren't to have any. I can't believe Mom told them if she died while I was on the trip and I called, they were to say she was fine."

I laughed. That was funny. Was it because she did not want to interrupt his trip? Was it because she said she didn't want him to come to her funeral? Was it that he put pleasure before her? I wondered.

Debbie was up to her old tricks and his Mom had paid for Jennifer's glasses. Kurt hadn't worked for seven weeks because he didn't want to leave home. They

had transferred money from savings to checking. Jack wondered if Betty knew that.

“And you left right after church?”

“Yes, people were sick and attendance was low. Three were baptized.”

“I might get baptized. I’d like Ray to be baptized, too.”

Bob called. He would be leaving Tuesday for a three day trip to Japan.

Jack was hurt because Bob thought I was abused. “I don’t want to abuse you.”

“You have never abused me physically, but verbally.”

“Have you ever tried to live with you? You use your intelligence and emotions. The last thing I wanted to do was abuse you. I saw my mother abused, and I mean really abused. I never wanted to abuse you because of this.”

The day passed slowly, avoiding each other, communication in monosyllables.

Jack and I attended the funeral of Eula’s ninety year old mother. Jack and Betty bought one basket of flowers with a card that read, “Gene’s Family”.

Bob called from Tokyo. Jack put his arm around me as we lay in bed.

It was exactly one month since we returned from the two month trip and exactly one year since Ormeda fell in the tub, the day after Thanksgiving, 1989.

I was satisfied after the month home my house was clean and organized. Ray had cooperated with sorting and throwing away when we cleaned the upstairs. Jack helped, mailing packages and lifting heavy pieces of furniture. Jack watched TV and if I talked, he’d say, “Don’t talk. I like it better that way.” I shut up. I answered only when he spoke to me. I noticed how jovial he was to Ray and to people on the phone. I was like a deaf and dumb person in my own home.

From Dreama on the phone I learned she was getting the same treatment from Ormeda I received. She refused to let her bathe her and change clothes. She did not want Dreama to go upstairs. Ormeda had told me, “Nobody’s allowed upstairs but Jennifer.” She put the guilt trip on both Dreama and me that she doubted our integrity or that Jennifer had rights we didn’t.

Two days of silence between Jack and I , and then he said, “Read this.” As I read, I knew he was brooding, thinking Bob thought he abused me.

“Do you want to talk?”

Jack turned off the lights. We tried to make sense of what had happened. We cried. Jack said, “I’ll make a new will. I’ll get back at you.” Another threat.

“I can’t control what you do, Jack. That’s up to you. When I had my hysterectomy, I knew I’d have to take whatever you handed out. You stood by me, and were good to me. That’s why I decided I’d stand by you, no matter what, and I have.”

“I’m always the villain. Why am I always the villain?” and he started slapping his face, first on one side and then on the other. He told me later he slapped himself so hard he saw stars.

“Would it help your pain if I left, if we separated, or got a divorce? I can’t help you, but you have God.”

“I love you, no matter what.” He went to bed.

I crawled in bed, exhausted. Maybe somewhere, somehow, someday, we could put this behind us.

Twenty-three

## Chapter 22

# The Cleveland Clinic

The day after Thanksgiving, Jack drove me to the Cleveland Clinic for a physical. After registering, I waited at Desk S40. At nine o'clock, I met a young Doctor of Osteopath. He took my family and personal history, then checked my heart beat and pulse.

"You have high blood pressure." My blood pressure had always been low.

"What could cause this?"

"Lots of things. Maybe the anxiety of being here."

He checked my toes and feet. "You have a planter's wart on your big toe."

I knew about planter's warts because my nephew had them.

"Let me see." I looked.

"Maybe it is a callous."

After the rectal exam, and he said I had blood in my stool, I questioned this. High blood pressure? Planter's warts? Blood in my stool? No, I thought.

The M. D. doctor interviewed me for five minutes and recommended I have an endoscopy. In the meantime, I took antacid after each meal and Pepcid at night.

Through cold rain and strong winds, Jack and I drove to the Cleveland Clinic. At Desk S41, I felt unkept, my hair a mess. My name was called.

I entered a room with eight beds and put on my robe as instructed. My blood pressure, taken with the blood pressure apparatus this time, was high 164/88. I was told again it was the anxiety of being there. They gave me a shot of Demiral and something else. I never knew when the tube went down my throat. When I realized what had happened, I heard a Chinese doctor say, "Some inflammation, no cancer. Your doctor will give you a full report."

Jack called my sisters, Bob and Lorna. Lorna said they prayed for me Sunday.

Another year had slipped into eternity, and Christmas was here. I awoke early to prepare the turkey Ray received from the union. Outside the sun made shadows of trees and shrubs on the snow covered ground. I thought of all the mothers up early with their children. I thought of Bob. I cried. I did not blame

Bob, but I knew I no longer had his respect and love. He could not reach out to us now, maybe never. Our relationship would never be the same.

Handmade gifts were under the tree from the grandchildren. A pink shirt with a picture of Japanese Gardens from Tokyo and a newly published engineering book from Bob. A foot massager and rewinder for our VCR from Ray. Jack and I got each other no gift.

Jack was needed to build handrails on the metal walk bridges across the creek so Helen and Dreama could get over the creek when the water was high. Jack and I planned to stay three days.

It was New Year's Day. I held and cleaned the boards and Jack measured and sawed. It was frosty, cool enough to stimulate our ambition but not so cold and snowy as to hinder progress. It took an extra day to complete the job, done well enough to ensure safety, but not to perfection. We said good-bye to Ormeda, still sitting and sleeping on the sofa.

When we were half way home, the four-speed locked on the Jimmy. We spent the night with relatives in Parkersburg. Ray came to get us. This was the beginning of the New Year, our car in the repair shop one hundred eighty miles from home. Another trip was made by Jack and Ray to pick up the Jimmy.

Three months had passed since the jealousy outbreak over the massage. Jack called Bob. Jack said, "It was bad, bad for me, bad for Lenore, just bad, real bad. "

Twenty-four

## Chapter 23

# Desert Storm

January 15, 1991. This was the final day for Saddam Hussein of Iraq to get his troops out of Kuwait. The world was anxious, nervous, exhausted, but the United Nations were prepared militarily, perhaps not emotionally. At twelve midnight, the deadline would be here. Iraq must get out of Kuwait to avoid war.

I thought of my father in World War I, my two brothers in World War II, and my nephew in Vietnam. The toll war had taken in their lives rekindled in my mind, and the difference it had made in my life burned in my memory. My father after World War I was declared mentally disabled. During World War II, my brother suffered as a P. O. W. in Germany. My oldest brother was in the 83rd Infantry Division that released Ray's P. O. W. group. Ray was marched, beaten and starved. He died at the age of forty-eight. My nephew had severe allergies after Vietnam.

I dreaded what could happen to young men after twelve on this day.

At seven o'clock that evening, January 16th, 1991, three A. M. in Baghdad, the United States, United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait attacked Iraq by air, at night. We were in war! Desert Shield now became Desert Storm. The United Nations first air attack on Iraq was successful. All airplanes returned except one from the United Kingdom, reports one American killed.

President Bush spoke from the Oval Office by TV at nine o'clock, five A. M. in Baghdad, Iraq, telling the American people that we had been in war with Iraq for two hours. He assured Americans that for five months the United Nations, twenty-eight countries had "exhausted peaceful solutions" to avoid war. He assured the people that the troops would have the best. Our goal was the liberation of Kuwait. He quoted Thomas Paine: "These are the times that try men souls." He was calm and informative during the twelve minute speech.

Iraq was "playing fox". Saddam Hussein called President Bush "Satan". Twenty four hours later on January 17th, about seven P. M. news was that Iraq had hit Israel with scud missiles. Israeli radios gave directions about the use of gas masks and to stay in closed rooms. It was unknown whether conventional or chemical war heads were used. Nerve gas would spread quickly, creep into cracks

of taped windows, causing nausea, dizziness and itching of the skin.. There was no confirmation any of the missiles had chemical weapons. Israel would not retaliate at this time.

Saudi Arabia was being attacked. Desert Storm had now been active thirty-six hours.

President Bush's second briefing by TV was Friday, January 18, 1991. He explained the United Nations were thirty-seven hours into Desert Storm. Two points were made. First, that Hussein took ten years to prepare for this and it would take time and effort. Secondly, we must be realistic, there would be losses, war is never cheap or easy. He again reiterated for Americans not to get overly "euphoric", that our goals were for Iraq to completely withdraw from Kuwait and abide by the United Resolutions.

Jack and I watched as much TV as possible, trying to understand as much about the war as possible. He called Ormeda. "It's nasty over there." He was upset when he found out the cattle had not been moved back to the meadow as he had arranged to be done. Basil was not there. Jennifer was.

President Bush was awakened at Camp David and told of the attack Saturday, January 19th, in early morning light. The second scud missile attack on Tel Aviv and Jerusalem began. People were in sealed rooms. Three false alarms had prepared the populace for such an attack. Were they conventional or chemical warheads and would Israel retaliate? All clear signals sounded.

Censorship of news tightened. Twelve Iraq soldiers were taken Prisoner of War on the U.S.S. Nicholas and promised humane treatment at a P. O. W. Camp.

Jordan announced they would hit any Israeli aircraft trying to bomb Iraq.

Iraq continued to bomb Israel and the U. N. Coalition continued to bomb Iraq. In Iraq, civilians were without communication, water and electricity. These were conditions worse than experienced with the war with Iran.

U. S. soldiers manned Patriot Defense missiles in Israel until Israeli soldiers were taught.

Reports showed six U. S. planes had been lost and one dead pilot, nine missing in action.

Sunday, the war was in the fourth day. Bombers were seeking out the Republican Guard, Iraq's best ground troops. Leaflets were being dropped, encouraging Iraqi soldiers to surrender. Israel assured the United States they would give notice before attacking Iraq, and hold off as long as possible. Schools where closed till further notice. The infantry was moving nearer the Kuwait border.

Molly and I went out to eat. Jack was at Gene's working on a fish scaler. Ray and his friend would DJ together for the first time for one hundred fifty people at a birthday party. President Bush assured Americans, "Life goes on".

Sunday morning a military briefing stated that "Allied forces were continuously bombing the Republican Guard" and the birthplace of Saddam Hussein had been bombed. To date, seven thousand sorties, round trip attacks, had been completed.

In a seven minute radio address, Saddam Hussein said he would speed up military action "to get rid of corruption, they had just begun to fight".

Iraq aimed missiles at Saudi Arabia, seventeen miles outside the city of Riyadh. Patriot missiles continued to intercept them. Scud missiles attacked Saudi Arabia, some stopped, some not. CNN showed soldiers screaming, trying to get to shelters.

Western journalists were invited to leave Iraq after heavy bombing. They were told hotels didn't have the basic necessities of life, such as electricity and water. Paul Arnett was the only CNN journalist left in Baghdad, and news would now be cleared by Iraqi censors.

Allied P.O.W.'s were being placed in strategic positions in Iraq, used as "human shields" to hinder further aggression. According to the Geneva Convention of 1925, when 164 countries made an international agreement of humanitarian rules and the Red Cross was started, this was a criminal offense. The United Nations said they would not alter their ways of war, and the State Department of the United States requested Iraq to follow rules.

It's Monday, January 21, 1991, in the United States. It's Martin Luther Day, a national holiday. Schools and most businesses are closed. It is the fifth day of Desert Storm. The people of Israel rested easier last night, knowing the Patriot missiles with United States soldiers were there. Nine Iraqi scuds had been shot down by Patriot missiles in Saudi Arabia and one had fallen in the water.

President Bush returned from Camp Ray by helicopter. He said he'd like to appeal that the P. O. W.'s be treated according to convention. Later, through an Executive Order, he allowed enlisted men tax exemptions while serving in Desert Storm and extended the time for filing.

Another day of war. Iraq was damaging and blowing up oil wells in Kuwait.

My soaps were interrupted, Special News Bulletin. Iraq attacked Israel again. At least one Scud missile had escaped the Patriots and fallen on a neighborhood in Tel Aviv. Sixty casualties in all. Ambulances were there, one woman died from a heart attack.

Six days of war. Progress was slower than expected. Reports were that Saddam Hussein was holed up in a nuclear-proof bunker under his presidential palace in Baghdad. The bunker cost one hundred million dollars, had walls six feet thick, and had partly been constructed by the Germans.

Wednesday, January 24, 1991, began the second week of the war, Desert Storm. I was weary of trying to get done what had to be done, and still not miss the latest news of the war. Paul Arnett, reporting from Iraq for CNN, said in the market areas people were buying fruits, vegetables, lamb and goat meat and cheese. City water systems were not working. He himself was trying to maintain health and cleanliness with one bottle of water a day. Bombing did not seem to excite the people as much as previously. The "baby formula plant" reported bombed by the Allied Forces was later identified as a chemical processing factory. Each time Paul Arnett reported, we were reminded this had been cleared by Iraqi censors.

Secretary of State Chaney asked for prayers for the P.O.W.'s and soldiers missing in action and their families. He asked for caution in overconfidence. He said Hussein had spent fifty billion on a large military force, the Iraqis were dug in, and that the Allies would protect lives as much as possible, that surprises

were ahead and Hussein would be defeated.

President Bush, at 7:40 at the Washington Hilton before the Reserve Officer Association said Desert Storm was on schedule and "We will stay the course and we will succeed all the way."

Thursday, January 24th, the eighth day of Desert Storm, I was busy moving nick-knacks to the basement getting ready for painters. Ray and I worked, Jack watched TV. He wasn't feeling well. Officers from several countries explained their involvement in Desert Storm. The United National Security Council met behind closed doors to discuss a pause for peace. United States now had twenty-nine Iraqi P.O.W.'s. The British had twenty-two. Attacks, mostly air force, were on schedule, marines were conducting rehearsals.

After a sleepless night, I awoke and Jack and Ray were planning to go to a movie, "Home Alone". I again carried things to the basement. News that million of gallons of oil, beyond control of man-made efforts, were being spilled into the Persian Gulf. Saddam Hussein had created an environmental hazard. President Bush said Saddam Hussein continued to amaze the world, parading American P.O.W.'s, using Scud missiles, and now oil spills which in no way is military.

The huge oil spills from Kuwait were incomprehensible, unexplainable and future damage unaccessible. Hussein denied doing it, reversing the blame to American tankers. As the polluted water flowed on and on, water supply for the Arabians would be unusable. This act was called, "environmental terrorism".

Day Ten, the oil spill was now over 30,000 miles long and eight miles wide. Part of it was on fire. Environmental specialists were being flown in. The military bombed, attempting to destroy manifolds, pipes which controlled the direction and pressure of the flow of oil.

General Norman Scjwarzkoph at a military briefing said there was no indication at all military action caused the oil spill, that Hussein said he would do this. He also said, "We don't want to destroy Kuwait by liberating Kuwait".

Israeli children were returning to school after ten days. This is where they belonged.

Monies from other countries to help finance the war was encouraging.

Sunday evening, six o'clock, Jack and I watched the Super Bowl game in Tampa, Florida. Security had been "beefed up". The New York Giants played the Buffalo Johns. President Bush and Barbara, in short speeches, recognized and commended the military in Desert Storm and children of parents serving there were present, each waving an American flag. The deciding play was Jim O'Brien, kicker for the Buffalo Johns, to kick a field goal. He missed. The New York Giants won 20 to 19. I sympathized with Jim.

Tomorrow the painters would come and the war would go on.

The painters did come and the war went on. Paul Arnett and Hussein had an interview in a bungalow in Iraq. Paul asked the questions and Hussein gave the answers, twisting the answer to favor Iraq and reinforce his confidence of Iraq's victory. He said the winner would be determined by "who has the devil and who has God on their side". The one and one-half hour long interview

ended when the Iraqi president, when asked about chemical warfare said, he would "equate weapons used against us".

NASA and other Americans stopped a minute in silence to remember the Challenger, a space that had exploded five years ago killing seven astronauts.

Day 13 of the Gulf War. One painter arrived early, one was late because his wife had thrown his car keys in the garbage. They finished and left at three o'clock.

At nine o'clock, President Herbert Walker Bush gave the State of the Union Address to the Joint Session of Congress.

"Mr. Speaker, the President of the United states" and President Bush entered, shaking hands as he walked toward the podium. He spoke to all Americans about a New World order and the importance of the individual. He spoke about domestic issues, such as crime, drugs, health care for the poor and elderly, elimination of political committees and the economy. He received a standing ovation when he said we must be "devoted to freedom for those in the Persian Gulf" and "our commitment to them must be equal to their commitment to our country". He ended, "Our cause is moral, our cause is just. Misty God bless the United States".

Twenty-five

## Chapter 24

# The War Goes On

The war was ongoing. About the same time President Bush was making the State of the Union address, troops in the Persian Gulf war experiencing their first ground attack. Three columns of Iraq forces attack an oil town in Khafji, Saudi Arabia. Luckily the residents had fled south after the war began and luckily two of the three attacks were stopped by aircraft. Twelve American Marines were the first killed in action on the ground and Iraq suffered a heavy loss.

Our house was a mess after the painting. Jack and I were determined to clean as we replaced curtains, pictures, furniture, and trinkets.

The Allied ground forces had retreated from Khafji, regrouped, attacked again and the Allies now had control of Khafji. President Bush announced February third, Sunday, would be a "National Day of Prayer for peace, families and the innocent caught up in the war and the United States of America".

Friendly fire, a term used to describe accidental action against one's own, was admitted, and had claimed at least seven lives. Over 41,000 sorties had now been flown.

Day 20, Monday, February 4th, Iran's President volunteered to mediate peace talks, probably to establish a stronger post-war political status. He would like to meet with both sides.

All Americans were asked to leave Jordan.

The question now was: When would the ground attacks take place? President Bush ordered Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Powell to go to Saudi Arabia to get an updated status report. Equipment was being moved nearer the Saudi Arabia border. In Iraq, the citizens were told no more gasoline for the car and heating oil would not be sold, even tho it was mid-winter.

The Cleveland Browns got their eighth coach, the youngest in the NFL, John Belichick, thirty-eight.

Wednesday, another day to put out the garbage to be collected, another day of war, Day 22. We were now in the third phase of the war, knocking out tanks, one by one. Iraqi jets trying to escape to Iran, were shot down by U.

S. warplanes. Animal rescue centers had been set up along the route of the oil slick.

Prime Minister Major's residence was attacked in the United Kingdom by mortar. Major thought it was an attempt to kill him and his cabinet, but "democracy cannot be intimidated", he said.

Ex-president Ronald Reagan celebrated his eightieth birthday with a twenty-five dollar a plate dinner, proceeds to go to the Reagan Library.

The third week of the war had passed. Eagerly, everyone waited to get Cheney and Powell's evaluation of the war. Scuds from Iraq continued to be launched. Patriots continued to stop them. Ground war continued to be delayed. Civilians in Iraq continued to be protected as much as possible by the Allies. The war was about a week behind.

At the farm, Dreama wanted to fix up the dining room. She called Jack. He referred her to Betty. Rebecca had not moved in but had come again for money. Debbie hid the check book from her and Ormeda said, "Don't let me know where the check book is." Debbie, hiding the check book from her sister. I remembered when Jack wanted to keep the check book from her.

February 9, 1991, Saturday in Saudi Arabia there was a powerful eight hour meeting of Defense Secretary Dick Cheney, General Colin Powell, and General Norman Schwarzkopf and other field commanders to establish a time schedule for the ground attack. Cheney was told another month of air war was advisable before ground war.

Hussein's radio speech on Sunday, February 10th, was like a pep talk to encourage his people to think victory. He apologized to them for the suffering and commended them for their patience and bravery.

President Bush, returning from Camp Ray, said this was not what he wanted to hear. He wanted to hear Hussein was withdrawing from Kuwait.

The next day, Jack and I left early for Florida, to visit Justine and Junior. The car radio was now our source of information about the war. I heard seventeen-year-olds were now being drafted in Iraq. Cheney and Powell were safely back in America and would brief President Bush soon.

Six-hundred miles south on the way to Florida, we heard via radio President Bush's reaction to the briefing was, "We're not talking about dates to add to air campaign, to take time."

We stayed at a motel in Columbia, South Carolina, and on Day 27 of the Gulf War got an early start. Our thoughts were on Lorna's mother, who had been taken to the hospital. We prayed.

Ten Iraq soldiers had walked into Saudi-Arabia and surrendered. Reports were that the Iraq soldiers were limited to one sandwich a day.

Hussein said he was willing to cooperate with Russia and some other countries to try to arrive at a peaceful solution to the war.

When Jack and I arrived in Clermont, Florida, Justine was cooking dinner and Junior was golfing. After a card game that night, we talked about the war. Was Hussein deliberately placing civilians among military facilities since the Allies plan was to avoid killing civilians?

Thursday it rained. We visited Jack's cousin and Jack disguised himself with an old hat and sunglasses. He faked being an insurance salesman. When he took off his hat and they saw his bald head, they recognized him. Everyone laughed and laughed. Ten of us went out to eat.

Day 30 of the Gulf War, February 15th, I lay in bed in the RV snoozing. I listened to the news. I yelled, "The war is over!"

Er-er-er-er, Mac barked. We all laughed. It had been a good joke.

Michel Gorbachev from the Soviet Envoy to Baghdad, said Hussein was willing to talk peace. News of possibility of conditional withdrawal from Kuwait came through the Revolutionary Command Council, Resolution 660, other resolutions not mentioned. Marlin Fitzwater said this was propaganda and rejected it. President Bush called Hussein's radio address "a cruel hoax". The United Security Council would reconvene on Tuesday to discuss Iraq's proposal to quit the war.

As we moved the RV from Clermont to Lake Okeechobee in Clewiston, we saw the young orange trees covered with ice, glistening in the sun.. The trees had been sprayed with water and the freezing would protect them from the unusual freezing weather in Florida.

It was Day 32 of the war. President Bush, because of criminal crimes, thought Hussein should not be president of Iraq after the war.

Five hundred twenty seven thousand United States troops under Desert Storm Commander Norman Schwarzhopf, were preparing for ground war. Allied bombs continued over Baghdad. The United States military assessed Saddam Hussein's forces had suffered horrendous losses. Secretary of Defense Cheney said thirty per cent of Iraq's tanks and forty per cent of its artillery had been destroyed.

On Wednesday, February 20th, 35 days of war and the Allies were bombing Iraq.

Twenty-six

## Chapter 25

# Tired of War

Saddam Hussein championed himself as leader of the Palestines in the radio address on February 21st. He said Iraq will fight till “martyrdom”. The Iraq forces are ready for a show- down and all out war. He commended his people and ended his speech, “God is great”.

President Bush did not accept the conditions of a message from Saddam Hussein that was delivered to Gorbachev in the Soviet Union. The White House said war would continue. The greatest concern was the two day cease fire which would allow Iraq to re-group.

After mailing Monika a birthday card and package, Justine, Junior, Jack and I went to Seminole Indian Bingo. We were excited as we rode the shuttle. We had heard of the extraordinary large crowds and winnings. The crowds were large, the jackpots larger than we expected. None of us won.

After Bingo, the news was that ground war would begin if Hussein did not begin withdrawal from Kuwait at high noon Saturday, and complete it in seven days. Pictures were shown of 145 oil facilities in Kuwait that had been set on fire.

The United States rejected the Soviet Plan and set up its own. There was a ninety minute talk between President Bush and Gorbachev.

February 23rd was my brother Ed’s Death Anniversary. The War in the Gulf and news that President Bush would trigger the largest ground attack ever, giving orders to commanders, refreshed my memories of Ed. TV and the news media, with detailed events day by day, made World War II with one brother wounded, receiving the Purple Heart, and another brother a P.O. W. at the disposal of Hitler’s rage, alive and real. I tried to picture them in combat. I appreciated their courage.

Was Saddam moving his troops out of Kuwait at noon? Had the big attack began?

Jack and I spent the day at Swamp Cabbage Festival in Labelle, Florida with Justine and Junior and did not hear the news. The deadline Saturday noon had passed. The evening news said everything was in order. The timing would be determined by General Schwarzkopf. The war was raging. Iraq was blowing up

everything they could in Kuwait. The invasion force was ready at the Kuwait border. Soldiers wrote letters home. The invasion by the Allies would be high risk, but quick.

President Bush asked everyone, regardless of what they were doing, to say a prayer for our soldiers risking their lives and "God bless the United States of America".

The Pentagon in Washington, D. C. reported the Allies would fight three battles, rear, main and deep. The rear battle was now in progress. The main force would move into Iraq, air, land and water.

One o'clock P.M. Saturday February 23rd, the ground war began. Saddam Hussein did not know what was happening. He said his people would not surrender.

Secretary of Defense Cheney said, "There is a large scale ground operation in Iraq. From this point forward, we will limit what we say. We assume enemy is confused and we cannot clarify his position. Even innocent information can be used against us." He was confident the American people understood.

It was all out war, all forces including ground forces, were being used. The British and French joined the ground offensive.

Sunday night would be our last night with Justine and Junior. The Allied troops were now into Kuwait one hundred miles with little enemy resistance. I was thankful President Bush and General Schwarzkopf could keep their minds and goals on track.

General Schwarzkopf announced "the first day of war had already reached its goal". The Kuwait News Agency said Allies are in control of the capital city of Kuwait, but this had not been confirmed by the White House.

Jack and I said good-bye to Justine and Junior on Monday, February 25th at Clerbrook RV Resort in Florida. I promised myself I would not cry, but I did.

President Bush received a warm welcome when he arrived in the East Room at eleven o'clock to address the issue of the war. He quoted General Powell, that news is good, United States and Coalition had few casualties. The war was on schedule, and the purpose of being here was to celebrate the achievement of black Americans.

As soon as Jack and I were alone together, the old tension between us revived itself. We traveled through Georgia without saying a word to one another. We entered South Carolina and Jack broke the silence.

"Looks like you want rid of me," he said.

"Looks like we want rid of each other," I answered.

"There has never been a day in the fifty years I've known you, I haven't loved you. You upset me. I can't take you doubting me."

"I can't take the exclusion," I responded. "What do you want to do? Do you want to spend the summer with Bob and Monika?" he suggested.

"I'm not welcome at Bob and Monika's" and tears filled my eyes as I remembered the feelings I had when I left their home. Tears were in Jack's eyes, too. He knew.

The six o'clock news broadcast reported Hussein had ordered his forces out of Kuwait, Baghdad radio, no date given. This had been communicated to the

Soviets, not the United Nations. Fitzwater, White House Spokesman said, "The war is on."

Forty-one days since the air bombing of Iraq began.

It was day three of the ground war, February 25th. On Baghdad Radio Saddam Hussein says Iraq troops will continue to withdraw from Kuwait. The United Nations Security Council convened behind closed doors during the night.

When Jack and I left Days Inn Motel in Virginia, we were surprised to see the car covered with snow. The snow laden trees were beautiful.

President Bush heard about the radio address from Baghdad at 5:20 A. M. and said "it was an outrage, a retreat," and that Hussein wanted to re-group to fight. The White House rejected the withdrawal. The war is ongoing. Iraq's forces are in full retreat and fighting, as Allies are attacking. The United Nation officials say Soviets want to propose a cease-fire if Iraq formally announces withdrawal.

As Jack and I enjoyed the beauty of lacy, snow covered trees, I said, "I don't feel comfortable at Bob and Monika's, Ormeda's, or with Justine and Junior any more."

"It's all because of me," Jack assumed responsibility.

"It's because of us. When we have quarrels we should keep it between us. We get others involved and they like you and they like me. They're in the middle. Emotions explode, and we hurt them, too."

"I never stopped loving you at any time."

"There's been times I've been very upset," and I wanted to say, "and wanted rid of you" but didn't. I, too, had never stopped loving him.

Three inches of snow was on the ground when we arrived home in Ohio about seven o'clock at night. Our trip had been misery. Ray was at work.

The United Security Council had adjourned their meeting. The Allies would determine when there would be cease fire. Robert Dole said it was "time for the Soviets to butt out". The Allies now control about half of Kuwait. Iraq had set fire to hundreds of oil wells before retreating. Rain and wind were enemies of the Allies now. Iraqis were surrendering in droves. Liberation of Kuwait was near.

I called Lorna. Her mother was better and attended church Sunday. Ormeda did not know Debbie's home had been burglarized. They had taken wine and beer from the refrigerator, jewelry, and Jennifer's money. Debbie had left the dogs loose in the house. Debbie did not want Rebecca to move in with her grandmother..

"I know Rebecca can get even with someone if she's mad. I heard her talk about it one time. I hope she wasn't the one who broke in."

"That's awful between sisters," she said. Jack was bugging me about the telephone bill, so I hung up.

The Iraqis were surrendering by the thousands, in full retreat. The Allies had moved in several directions. Howard Jaco, a reporter in Kuwait, reported at 6:45 the people are beginning to awaken and the Kuwaitis expect to raise their flag soon. Law and order was being maintained by Kuwait Resistance until the

Allies arrived. In southern Kuwait, a tank battle was taking on the Republican Guard. Iraq tanks trying to evacuate to Baghdad were taken by the Allies.

DAY 42, Wednesday , February 27, 1991, President Bush says liberation of Kuwait is almost complete. He now turns his thought to post-war efforts. Iraq has told United Nations, Baghdad Radio, it will accept all twelve resolutions, all reparations, and withdraw from Kuwait, and will release all P.O.W.'s after cease fire. Again this was rejected by the U. S. and considered conditional.

General Schwarzkopf gave a briefing. There were seventy nine casualties in all. He concluded, "Peace is not without cost. War continues to go on. There are great heroes out there."

Four days of land battle, and Kuwait raised the flag of their homeland for the first time in seven months. Allied troops were welcomed. People streamed out of their homes, and danced in the streets. The last battle of the war was a tank war with the Republican Guards. The United Nations Security Council, after the closed-door meeting, said Saddam Hussein must accept all twelve resolutions, not three as proposed. Cheney said the United Nations was on verge of "total victory".

Twenty-seven

## Chapter 26

# Victory

At nine o'clock from the Oval Office at the White House, President Bush announced, "Iraq's army is defeated.. Kuwait has been liberated. Our military objective has been met." He concluded, "I am pleased to announce at twelve o'clock , one hundred hours after ground operation began, all United States and offensive military operation will be suspended."

KUWAIT'S LIBERATION DAY: February 27, 1991, headlines. END OF WAR: Desert Storm, February 27, 1991, twelve P. M.

The war was now behind us. There was forty-three days of war to free Kuwait. The first night of peace in a month in Iraq, people celebrated. Streets buzzed, and there was dancing.

In Israel, they stored their gas masks. They tore down plastic from the windows. They, too, danced in the streets.

Jordan held on to hostility toward the United States and the Allies, and denied they shipped arms to Iraq during the war.

Iraq said they would accept all twelve resolutions. Baghdad Radio announced they were happy the operations have ceased "to save the blood of their sons and daughters." They claimed victory.

The United States Senate passed a resolution commending President Bush and the Allies for a job well done, and asked for a day of prayer. President Bush said he wants to move fast with peace in the East. Sunday Allied commanders will meet with Iraq to iron out cease-fire.

Kuwait celebrated., even though devastation was great. There had been looting and destruction as the Iraq soldiers withdrew.

The new U. S. Ambassador Gnehm was at the embassy in Kuwait.

The War in the Gulf was now history. I had watched, interpreted and analyzed what was happening from TV and reading. Peace, the return of our troops and P.O.W.'s , rebuilding Kuwait and Iraq, and victims getting their lives back to normalcy, lay in the future. President Bush and other authoritative people worked together to heal wounds politically, economically and humanely. They wanted a plan for world order.

I, too, would try to maintain some order in our lives.

Twenty-eight

## Chapter 27

# Basil's Sixty Six

Debbie called. "Someone threw a rock through the bedroom window at the cabin."

"We'll fix it when we come down for Basil's birthday party. It's at six o'clock, isn't it?"

"Yes, and it's to be a surprise."

Jack and I "killed time" until six o'clock. We drove across the meadow, exactly at six. Only Dreama's car and Basil's truck were parked in front of the house.

Jack and I entered the front door. Ormeda was alone in the living room I touched her gently on the hand, "We've come for Basil's birthday party."

She shook her head knowingly.

Dreama came in from the kitchen and told us she was keeping Basil occupied. Cliff, Lorna and her mother, Helen and other relatives entered. They carried the birthday cake Jack and I bought, home made soups, crackers, potato chips, and drinks.

"Sh-sh! Basil's in the kitchen. Dreama is keeping him there."

They put the food on the stairs. Basil and Dreama entered to the tune of "Happy Birthday". Basil, short, becoming more and more bald and gray, flashed a big grin.

"I thought I heard something in here."

The food was arranged on the dining room table. From an old custom, the men sat at the table. The women, with plates filled, stood and ate in the kitchen.

Debbie, Jennifer and Misty arrived late. They joined the women in the kitchen. I asked Jennifer to help me carry up presents from the car.

"You're my helpmate. How's school?" "My daddy put four hundred dollars in the bank from his pay check for my college." No comment, and I thought about the innocence of youth

Our gift puzzled Basil. It was huge and very heavy.

"What is this, gold bars?" Everyone laughed, including Ormeda, as he struggled to unwrap it.

“This fifty pound block is for my cows. They’ll love it.”

“How many cows do you have?” Lorna asked.

“Nine. Thank you. You really surprised me.”

Basil and I were now alone at the dining room table. Softly, almost in a whisper, he said to me, “I hate to see Debbie turn Ormeda against Jack the way she is. Don’t tell this, but Debbie’s in-laws caught Debbie in the cashier drawer at their business. You know how Debbie got around it? She told them, ‘I always take what I want at Ormeda’s.’ They told her never to come back.”

Jack gave Dreama money for paint and curtains they had bought for the farm house. Jack and Basil repaired the broken window at the cabin.

On our way home, I could not keep it a secret. I told Jack about Debbie taking money from the cashier’s drawer. “Sometimes I think Basil dreams up all that stuff.”

Jack had “a chip on his shoulder” toward Basil.

Jack defended Debbie.

The doctor was coming to see Ormeda the next day. I called Dreama. “Ask him to look at that spot, the one about the size of a quarter, on her leg. I think her legs are extra dry because she sits before that fire all the time. “A craftamatic bed might be good for her.”

“I mentioned the craftamatic bed to her, and she’s afraid she’ll fold herself up in it.” I’m sure Ormeda meant this to be a joke.

“You buy Ormeda Neutrogenia cream and Dove soap, and I’ll pay for it.” I told her.

“I just painted the utility room and I’m very tired.” I knew it needed painted, and I knew she would be the one to do it.

President Bush made a speech on March 6, 1991, at nine P.M. to the Joint Session of Congress. It was called “a victory speech”. He deserved the many standing ovations. He suggested four proposals for peace: To create shared security arrangements, To control proliferation of weapons, To secure peace in the Middle East, and To foster economic development. He told about an American soldier assuring Iraqi P.O.W.’s all was well when they were captured. Holding back tears, he said, “Let us always be good, generous and caring in all we do.”

Twenty-nine

## Chapter 28

# Easter

Ormeda invited all family members for an Easter dinner at the farm. She would buy the food. Debbie and Rebecca would prepare it.

As Jack and I walked up the narrow sidewalk, four men stood talking. I could see Max was one of them. I had not seen Max since that awful day.

What would I say? How would I act?

I passed near him and softly said, "It's good to see you, Max. It's been misery."

Max's brown eyes darted sideways toward me.

"It sure was."

I knew and he knew the suffering each of us had endured. We were glad it was over.

Jack and I spent the day laying carpet at the cabin while the girls prepared Easter dinner. Sunday morning we went to church and stopped at Ormeda's to eat. I talked to Ormeda, avoiding going into the kitchen.

"There were fifty-three at church. Jack wanted to sit near the front because he forgot his hearing aids. We had to sit in the back, it was so crowded. Lorna read about the lily, a symbol of resurrection. At the end, she presented the lilies to three women over seventy years old. Vi was one of them. I'll go see if they need me in the kitchen."

I helped put the food on the table and serve. Debbie and Rebecca were good cooks.

Jack and I were surprised when Max came to the cabin to visit. "The call I got from you in Florida was the best phone call I ever got." Jack was pleased.

Before we left the next day, the doctor came to visit Ormeda. He adjusted heart and water medicine. He confirmed she had congestive heart failure. Nothing about her legs.

At home, the phone rang and it was Max.

"I'm going to talk to Debbie. This is the thing to do."

Back home in Florida, Max called us again. "I didn't accuse Debbie. I just told her how it would be. She would pay her own electric bill. She would leave the Gravely tractor at the farm. She would not handle any more of Mom's

money. Dreama and Helen will do the shopping, and Basil will pay them. I told her under no circumstances is she to tell Mom. She is to help out with Mom for living in the “schoolhouse” rent free.”

What Jack had tried to do, Max and Betty were doing a year later. Jack would still be the villain, since no one was to tell Ormeda.

For now, Max and Jack had dissolved their differences. Debbie could not spend her grandmother’s money. Max and Betty had included Jack.

Jack transferred five thousand dollars to an account in his name only, omitting Ormeda’s. It was Ormeda’s money and would be there when needed. It was safe.

Thirty

## Chapter 29

### Stress

Ormeda sensed something had changed, but could not quite put it together.

Jack and I were at the cabin again. April showers and gloom dampened our personalities. The ground was wet. Kerosene lamps flickered. The electricity would not be restored for two weeks. New electric poles and lines had to be replaced after the wind damage.

Justine and Junior, and Jack and I met at our property in Sand Fork. The wind had toppled a beautiful silver maple, its huge root system torn out of the ground. In the misty rain, Justine and I watched as Junior and Jack cut our mother's favorite tree into fireplace logs.

Justine and Junior stayed all night with us. By lamplight, we played cards. The second night, Gene and Eula arrived, and the six of us played cards at Ormeda's.

Basil watched. He said privately to me, "Be good to Debbie. She is not speaking to any of the people that work for Ormeda."

Dreama told Jack, "Debbie and the children are no longer happy when they visit Ormeda. She doesn't speak to me unless I speak first or ask a question. She told Betty she is moving out of the "schoolhouse", her home for thirteen years. Betty told her it would hurt her grandmother, and ask her to wait a while."

The hurt Debbie felt from Max's visit was sifting through to all of us. She made a quick U- turn when she saw Jack's car parked in front of the house.

"Basil had no right to move in here where he had no business. Max should not have got everything stirred up and then leave without leaving any perfume to clean up the stink." Jack told Dreama.

I told what I thought. "What they need is one person at the head of things, and it shouldn't be Debbie because she is the next generation and that would cause too much friction with the whole group of nieces and nephews." I wanted to talk to Debbie, but not at this time.

I didn't agree with Jack about Basil. I could see his being there kept Jack from being there. I thought Max had been too hard on Debbie. Debbie had resisted, and Max had to be harsh. He had accomplished what Jack had tried

to do a year ago.

What a mess! In the aftermath of the Gulf War thousands of refugees from Iraq in Turkey and Iran were starving, dying, and homeless.

At home, the secret from Ormeda about Debbie and the money, was creating an upheaval. Basil was using his own money to pay Ormeda's expenses. If they asked Ormeda to sign checks, then she would know Debbie was not longer in charge.

Jack told Max, "The five thousand is for emergencies only, and I don't consider this an emergency. I will send Basil seven hundred. to help get through this." Jack had no checks.

"Betty does have Power of Attorney. It is in the bank at Glenville." Max told Jack.

"I will contest the will if the "schoolhouse" is given to Debbie, even if it means I am completely left out." Jack was emphatic.

All this confusion because Max wanted Debbie excluded from handling Ormeda's money, and they did not want Ormeda to know.

Debbie was pretty, but not stupid. She would not deliver the mail to her grandmother. The bank statements were not delivered. The bills were not delivered. Dreama was afraid the telephone would be disconnected.

Ormeda should know. She should know Jack did not do this.

Thirty-one

## Chapter 30

# A Stress Test

The mess after change of control of Ormeda's money began to resolve. The right things were done. Jack called Max and told him he was unable to send the seven hundred dollars. Max called Ormeda and told her Debbie was no longer in charge of the banking, other arrangements had been made. For two days, Ormeda was quiet.

It was a surprise when Betty called early in the morning. Max would have a stress test, April 30th. Max smoked, construction work was stressful, and the latest events of the last year and a half had taken their toll. He told Jack at the cabin he was having chest pains.

Jack, sitting at the dining room table, mediated silently a few minutes. I silently prayed.

All agreed, Ormeda would not know, until more definite results were known.

I liked Old Mikie, fifteen years younger than I. He was so much like his dad, in looks and determination to make a buck. Melba went to school and received a nursing degree when things got rough for them, stood by him, rearing four children, now all young adults.

The stress test was over, results of the catheter finalized. Max had one artery blocked thirty per cent, which could be helped with medication. Irritation, possible from nicotine and caffeine, were causing heart spasms which caused the pain. Max would have to quit smoking, and this time, hopefully, he would succeed.

Jack and I were happy and thankful. Jack explained the results to Dreama and wanted her to make sure Ormeda knew the results were better than expected after the stress test.

Dreama said they could not decide which electric bill was Debbie's and which one was Ormeda's. The one that was over eighty dollars, more than Ormeda's usual bill, had come to them. Jack told them who to call at the electric company and he could help them out.

Debbie was telling everyone she was being forced out of the "schoolhouse".

Four days after Max's test results, on Saturday April 4th, at 4:20 P.M., President Bush after walking and jogging for forty minutes at Camp Ray, Mar-

leeland, was taken to Bettyesdea Medical Hospital. Diagnosis, atria fibrillation, irregular heartbeat, not a heart attack, and no heart damage. He was given digoxin, a safe medication to slow the heartbeat. Later he was given procainamide, medication to control heartbeat to a normal rhythm.

Barbara Bush said he was doing "Great".

Power of the presidency would not be transferred to Vice President Quayle. Immediately the news media said, "He's a heartbeat away from the presidency". They questioned his qualifications. President Bush, on TV, said he wished the media would "lay off", that he'd gone through it for eight years.

Bush had the same diagnosis as Max. Max had been put on digoxin, but Max had been warned he was a prime candidate for a heart attack. Bush hadn't.

Max told Jack, "Betty is coming home. We'll have a family meeting."

"I'll stay at the cabin," I told Jack.

"Oh, no, you won't. If Paul's there, you'll be there. I'm sure Eula and Melba will be there, too." That took care of all the in-laws.

"I'll say my piece, and then shut up." Jack promised.

The news now was that Debbie would buy a house. Ormeda continued to say, "I need Debbie. She cuts my toe nails and bathes me."

"I can do that, Mom," Jack told her. "I don't want any man pawing over me." No, she wanted Debbie.

George Bush was back at the White House on Monday. Electric shock had not been necessary. Dan Quayle had not been needed to assume presidential duties. He had taken a beating from the news media.

Overactive thyroid was the diagnosis for Bush's health problem. He would have to slow down.

Thirty-two

## Chapter 31

# Mother's Day

I am a mother. Ormeda is a mother. I am sixty-five, she is eighty-eight.

"Ray, I hate to do this. Would you care if we delayed out Mother's Day dinner at Chi Chi's? They're having Open House for Aunt Vi and your dad could spend Mother's Day with his mother."

"No problem, Mom," Ray answered.

Jack and I stopped at the bank and got a check for \$732-. We would give the check to Basil to use until the meeting on June first.

Ormeda was on the sofa.

"Debbie's going to move. I'll just give her this house." Another threat, and she gave me the familiar look that searches for your reaction.

I'm sure my reaction was not what she expected. "Bob's going to move, too. Moving is a lot of work, and from Seattle to Florida."

Dreama motioned me into the kitchen. "We've had a bad time. Ormeda does not want to sign checks for Basil. She won't let us do things for her or bathe her. Debbie doesn't speak to any of us. I told Debbie we just worked here. We'd done nothing to her. She said, 'I've been angry.' We're all ready to quit if Debbie gets control of the check book again. Last month our bills were \$578- and that included two oil lamps. I did not work full hours, tho."

"Dreama, what Max did was right, but he didn't go far enough. He needed to see if Helen, Basil and you wanted to do it."

"Oh, Max talked to us."

"The loophole was when Basil had to get Ormeda to sign the checks. The secret was out."

"Ormeda says she will not sign any more checks for us."

"That's why Jack brought the check. The family will have a meeting in June. That money will last until then."

"Hopefully, something will be worked out. Please let us know what happens." She was emphatic, almost mad.

"You definitely should know. It's time Debbie takes her place with the other nieces and nephews and goes out on her own. I think Debbie, Ormeda and

Betty will be a coalition. They're the ones that have the legal power and that motherly instinct for Debbie. The three boys will have to stick together."

"We don't have to take this treatment." She was firm.

"Dreama, I know. I've seen it. I saw it when I was preparing Christmas dinner and Debbie came up with her nose in the air. She snooped into everything I was doing. I think the family will get this worked out."

"I hope so."

"I do, too. We'll let you know."

Jack and Basil left early to go to Glenville to open a checking account for \$732-. I stayed with Ormeda. As always, she had a sentence to lead into my opinion.

"Everything is a squabble here," she said.

"I don't know what you mean," I said, trying to act ignorant and innocent.

"I think you do." Ormeda was not dumb.

"Yes, I know some things that are going on. I'd have to be blind and deaf if I didn't."

"It's about their inheritance. I've tried to do the right thing." A gleam came in her eyes.

"Ormeda, I don't think its the inheritance. Your children love and respect you enough that whatever you say would be all right. It's about morals and character."

"Debbie didn't take anything."

"That's where the problem is. You don't think she did and others do. Remember when Junior was living , and you said your kids would never squabble over things. Junior said, "By God, my girls had better not be left out?"

"And right there was a squabble." She caught my point. I smiled.

"My mother and dad turned everything into cash and gave us each the same amount. Of course, we had some trouble with Aunt Mollie's will." I described the three pieces of furniture I'd inherited from Aunt Mollie.

"I grew up with your kids," I said.

"I expect you know them better than I do."

"I don't know Betty. I know her the least. She left for college, then married, and wasn't in but once or twice a year."

"Usually once a year."

"I knew I loved Max the first time I saw him after the explosion between Jack and he."

"What explosion?" and she looked puzzled.

"After Jack and Max had their differences." She didn't seem to remember. "Jack and I were really hurt for about a year, but we're over it now. You can see we handle it by staying at the cabin as much as we can. We try not to interfere."

"Jack was hurt. I didn't know that. I always asked him to do things for me. I could always depend on him. Jennifer cried for three days because she has to move."

I touched her shoulder gently. "You're not going to like this. I've heard others say, and I've seen it myself, Debbie and Jennifer put on an act."

“I know they can.” She agreed with me. I nearly fainted.

“You know I’m going to die. I can’t live forever.”

“We’re all going to die. We wouldn’t be very intelligent if we didn’t know that, would we? I have a friend in Marileeland about your age, and she always wants to know, ‘Am I going to die today?’”

Did Ormeda want to tell me more about dying and I had closed the door? I handled this poorly. I went to the kitchen to visit Helen.

Thirty-two

## Chapter 32

# Marihuana in the Cellar

I always enjoyed talking with Helen. She told me she and her daughter could get lots of jobs and that Debbie never spoke to her.

“So you’ve made a reputation for yourselves,” I said. “You are good.”

“Craig was over the other day and went in the cellar house. In the corner was a plastic bag. He came in and got me. It was chopped up marihuana. Craig asked me if I were going to burn it. Her brown eyes danced. “I told him, ‘I’m not touching it.’ Three days later, it was gone.”

I remembered the parties Dreama said Debbie had at Betty’s cabin. She said they were always careful to clean up so Betty wouldn’t know. I also remembered I had heard Dreama was on marihuana and her husband peddled it in Ohio. Another mystery, and another secret from Ormeda.

Jack and I returned from the florist at Glenville to pick up flowers from the florist. They were from Max for Ormeda for Mother’s Day. Tessie, Helen’s daughter, and I were in the kitchen. Jack talked loud, too loud.

“Debbie ripped you off. I will take care of you.”

“I wish it was the way it use to be,” and then shouting, Ormeda said, “Shut up. I’ve heard enough.”

Tessie told me she would ask for a raise to four dollars an hour when Betty came in, but it had to be kept secret. If she asked for more they’d have to give Dreama a raise.

“On the bus, Jennifer said she had a computer Grandma got her, and she didn’t even know she paid for it.” This was the second time I’d heard it, so it came as no surprise.

Ormeda, proud, told me Max and Debbie had talked. Max said to Debbie, “Don’t you know I have a bad heart?”

Debbie had answered, “I don’t give a god damn about your heart.” After she told me this the second time I said, “I think that is terrible, don’t you?”

I knew she’d had a change of opinion when she answered, “Yes, I do.” She had agreed with me again.

Jack came in and said, “Let’s get the hell out of this god damn place. It’ll set you crazy.”

At the cabin, he mowed the grass the second time, with a lower setting on the lawn mower. We were tired. He was calmer.

Even at the cabin, we could not escape the news. Ormeda said she would buy Rebecca a new kitchen stove. She would pay the eighty dollar electric bill because the account was in her name.

Jack went back to visit his mother. "What will you do with the house if Debbie moves?"

"Burn it."

"I'll take you down and let you put the match to it." Jack was calling her bluff, but she called his.

"Kurt will take me," she blurted out at him.

Kurt and Debbie were looking at houses. Kurt's parents were helping them finance it. Kurt's relatives were shocked when Debbie said she wanted a new house. Jack told his mother,

"Everything will be out in the open at the up-coming meeting, and that includes the employees. Nothing or no one will be spared."

Mother's Day 1991 was over. Open House for Aunt Vi had been a blessing. I wanted to be with Ray, away from the turmoil. In the morning, we'd leave for home.

Thirty-three

## Chapter 33

# Before the Meeting

Rebecca had a seven pound, four ounce baby girl Misty 14th at five o'clock, C-section. Her mother, Susan, was with her. Debbie had planned to be with her but was working at the pawn shop and had no car.

The father was living with another woman, who was three months pregnant. He was not working, and when I asked how they'd live, Kathy answered, "Welfare".

Rebecca, the youngest of Junior's daughter's, now had two daughters, no husband, no work skills. I had encouraged her to go to college and delay parenthood. I pointed out Debbie and her life.

She answered, "She had Jennifer." I could not argue with that. Jennifer was a beautiful girl.

Memorial Day this year was celebrated Misty 27th, instead of the traditional Misty 30th. There were many parades in memory of the veterans of all wars, including the War in the Gulf. Vice President Quayle laid a wreath at the Unknown Soldiers Grave in Washington, D. C. President Bush gave a graduation speech at his Alma Mater, Yale University. Jack, Ray and I spent the day quietly at home, waiting for the meeting at Ormeda's on June 1st.

Helen called. Dreama had quit her job. She left after she told the children it wasn't funny to spill stuff all over the kitchen. Rebecca came in and told her it was her job to clean it up. She asked Rebecca not to come there again when she was there. Dreama went home, sat on her front porch and cried for twenty minutes. Helen talked to her, and she said she'd come back.

"Dreama, I have heard Rebecca takes tantrums. I have never seen or heard her, though. I agree the children should sit at the table when they eat or drink."

"Lenore, my main concern is that the children will leave something on the floor and Ormeda will fall."

"We know you are doing a good job. We'll try to be down early before the meeting."

"The bridge is out near Basil's and I had to walk in this terrible heat to get to Ormeda's. She still refuses to let me bathe her. I'm certain Debbie will have it done by the time Betty gets here."

"I can see how strenuous this is for you."

Jack and I left early. In the meadow, we could see bales of hay. Jack drove the Town Car across the meadow to where the men were, working in the ninety degree weather. Their faces were tan and sweaty, their tee shirts wet with perspiration, arms and necks covered with grass and seeds and they looked tired. Basil and I sat side by side on a bale of hay.

I knew Basil wanted to rest and talk.

"I asked Debbie if I'd ever done anything to hurt her. Aunt Ormeda told me I could take the starter from her tractor and use it in mine. I don't know why Debbie was in the garage, but she told Aunt Ormeda I was stealing parts from the tractor. Aunt Ormeda asked me if I were stealing and I told her I'd taken the starter." He paused.

"I've lost two cows."

"How could you lose two cows if you fed them everyday?" I asked.

"They were grazing in the pasture. I could see them but never counted them. I smelled this awful odor. It looks like one fell over the cliff while giving birth. The other one was not far away. The maggots were everywhere. It was so awful I couldn't stand it. Later I'm going to check the bones and see if they were shot. Do you think Kurt would do this?" He suddenly acted as if he'd wished he hadn't said this. "Why would anyone want to do this?"

He had spared me no details. "I don't know. I think you've turned into a fine man, Basil."

"What do you mean, 'turned into one'?" We laughed and he knew what I meant.

"Well, I hear you used to be sexy. Notice, I said hear. I used to defend you and tell people I knew you didn't go out with women the six weeks you lived with us. You couldn't afford it and there was no unaccountable time. I'm sorry you lost your cows. I know a person can become attached to an animal. I'm also sorry for the financial loss, and sorry because you'll never know how they died."

It was time to unload two trucks of hay. Air conditioning at the cabin was a blessing.

Craig, Kathy and their little girl visited us at the cabin. The girl and I drew pictures. I took her for a ride in Ray's blue wagon. She gave me wild daisies she picked.

Kathy told about Rebecca's children spilling kool aid at Ormeda's. It was different than the story we had heard from Dreama. Ormeda had said, "All kids spill things sometimes."

Kathy was on Rebecca's side. "Dreama was really yelling." We listened.

Jack's cousins, Lorna and Cliff, visited that evening for cards. I was surprised to see a new red, modern van coming over the terrible roads.

"I'm glad you came. I hate to see you get the van dirty. I remember Kurt said he'd like to live as far as he could back in the sticks, and at that time I thought he was jealous of Debbie. We're as far back as we can get."

"Maybe he has a right to be jealous. I hear Debbie is a big flirt and things are being said about Jennifer. They're at The Lounge a lot. I hear Kurt has

a Harley-Davidson. We all know that's his ambition. He won't bring it around here. If they bought the house I think they did, he will need it to get them out to the road." We laughed.

They were leaving. I thanked them for coming and for their support. They left us a summer quarterly from the church.

June first arrived, and it was hot, very hot, even though it had rained during the night. Jack and I showered and dressed and rode in Basil's old jeep to Ormeda's. Debbie's car was there.

"I'm not going up," Jack said.

"I am. I'm as good as anyone and I won't be run out." I entered with a dish Lorna had asked me to return to Ormeda and cherry cobbler she had sent. Debbie left the room. I could see she was wearing shorts.

Ormeda was clean. Her hair had been shampooed and was still wet. She was wearing a night gown Jack and I had given her for Mother's Day. Jack said in a loud voice meant for Debbie's ears, "I see you cleaned Mom up because you know Betty's coming." Debbie kept on going.

"Don't leave, Debbie, because we came. We're leaving," Jack called to her.

Debbie went to her car. She turned and came back through the gate with her head down, pouting. I had heard Dreama talk about this pouting she could do.

"I'm wiping my hands of this place." The tears came.

"Debbie, I want you to know I had nothing to do with this last episode. We even got to the place where we could talk, remember?" She accepted this, turned, and went into the house.

Jack and I went to the cemetery and cleaned our little girl's grave. We put a bouquet of roses by the tomb stone.

Jack and I met Max and Dreama at a restaurant in Glenville. We talked, and ate together. Jack and Max went to get hair cuts, because they were cheap here. The meeting would be late.

Thirty-four

## Chapter 34

# The Meeting

Everyone was laugh and telling childhood stories. Eula and I sat on the stairs. The others sat in the huge overstuffed chairs, except Ormeda. She sat on the sofa. Melba had not come from Florida with Max. I promised Jack I would not talk, but wanted to tell about the marihuana.

“Let’s get this thing on the road,” Jack said in a voice that was too loud.

Betty was startled. I wondered if she knew there was to be a meeting.

Max said, “Let’s the four of us go into the dining room,” meaning Jack, Betty, Gene and himself, Ormeda’s four children.

Betty came alive, “You mean there’s something you don’t want Mom to hear?” Yes, I thought, I don’t want her to know about the marihuana.

There was a long pause. I remembered Jack said I was to be there if Paul was. I said, “Paul, would it be all right if we went into the dining room and left them here?”

“I’m a guest here,” he said, looking back over his shoulder at me.

“What is going to be said my wife can’t hear,” Gene asked. That settled it. We all, including eighty-eight year old Ormeda would be at the meeting. There went my chance to tell Betty about the marihuana.

Jack, hyper, said, “We’ve got a stacked deck. Betty’s got Power of Attorney and is Administrator of the will.” Jack went outside to take a nitroglycerin pill and came back much calmer.

Max said, “Yeah, Betty, how come you know what’s in the will and none of the rest of us do. Mom, do you trust Betty more than you do us?” Betty and Ormeda’s communication was, first a long silence, and then a look no one could have misinterpreted, “We’ll stick together.”

Betty, carefully phrasing her words and speaking slowly, said, “It’s in the safety deposit box in Glenville. I’ll get copies of it made and mail each of you a copy. In the United States, part of being in a democracy is leaving heirship to whomever you want.” Betty always pulled this shit as if the rest of us didn’t know this. “The will is fair.”

“I was afraid for you kids to come home,” Ormeda said, sensing what might be ahead.

I leaned over Ormeda so she could hear, and spoke just to her. "Ormeda, we have to stop the talk that's going around. Your family is honorable. Maybe the meeting will do that."

Listening, one would have thought Max and Gene had rehearsed their re. Each complimented and reenforced the other's position. Two times when I tried to say something, Jack stopped me. I finally got in my idea. "When the meeting is over, Dreama and the workers would like to know our decisions."

Betty jumped on that quickly. "They have no right to know."

"Oh, yes, they do," Max and Gene answered in unison. "They work here."

Someone said Jimmy's children were lazy, no good leeches, parasites.

"So your anger is over Junior's children." Betty was acting the psychologist.

"Nobody stole off me," Ormeda said.

"Do you want to sell the farm so you can support that?" Gene asked.

"I'll just support what I can and I'll be the judge of what I support." Ormeda was angry.

"You wouldn't put up with it for one minute with us kids. You'd switch us with dam little branches off those apple trees out there." Gene reminded his mother. "Why do you allow it with this generation?"

Debbie's husband was mentioned.

In his defense, Ormeda said, "There's a little job he's doing for me, but I'm not saying what it is."

"You mean a ten minute job," Gene was serious, yet teasing.

When no one urged Ormeda to tell more, she couldn't hold it back. "I'll tell you what it is. He's going to put signs up over the farm that says it was my grand dad's farm so people will know it's not Basil's or anyone else's farm." We knew she meant to say Jack's farm, but caught herself in time to change it.

"What ever happened to dad? Didn't he have anything to do with this farm?" Gene asked, reminding her of his deceased father. "Dad worked hard on this farm and so did we. We worked hard for it just to be a hobby farm."

"Yeah, and why hasn't there been a tomb-stone put on Dad's grave?"

In Ormeda's first will provisions had been made for a tomb-stone. Betty did not dare mention what the latest will said. Jack, Max and Gene said they would have one put in.

Paul and Eula, the other in-laws, remained silent during the meeting. Over Jack's protests, I said none of us had been asked to share in the expenses of hiring Helen. I said Kurt had a motorcycle he would not bring to the farm. I did not mention marihuana. I protected Ormeda.

Jack and I left the meeting early. I did not have answers for Dreama. I did not know the future of the checking account, or her future.

Ormeda and Betty had taken a verbal beating. They remained together in their confidentiality and determination to stay together, the will, and their plans. The boys had been pushed farther away.

Gene's daughter, Jack and I rode the old jeep to the cabin. I was glad she was with us. The jeep stopped four times, but at last we were there. She was wearing a cast for a broken leg and walking would have been hard for her.

Lesla, Jack and I went to church the next morning. As we came nearer, we could see the congregation was outside. They could not go in, because a dog had been trapped in the church since last Sunday. The odors from the carcass reeked. Chairs and benches had been moved under the trees. The minister preached a sermon about choosing a hero, Jesus.

We told Eula we would not eat at Ormeda's. We left for the restaurant.

We arrived at the farm house after they had dinner. Betty had cut Ormeda's hair. Kathy and the children were there. Kurt, Debbie and their children left when Gene mentioned the Gravelly tractor. Eula told me there had been a strong identity between Betty and Debbie.

Ormeda, Paul and Betty were in the living room. When I went in to say something as I always did to Ormeda, Betty got out of her chair. As she was leaving she said, "I've got to clean the air."

I took this remark personally, that I was contaminating the air.

"Ormeda belongs to someone besides you," I said angrily.

I went into the kitchen. I pounced on innocent Paul, who had gone around the house and come in the side door.

"I'm as good a Christian as anyone." This remark was motivated by the fact he was once a minister, and attended church the day services were held outside. "Betty has never liked me because of the way I treated Jack when we were dating. I've been a good daughter-in-law, a good mother and a good wife. She'd just better count her blessings."

I looked around and Melba, Max's wife, who had arrived after the meeting, was coming from the living room carrying two pictures of Judy, her daughter. She had taken them from the piano.

"I'm taking these. Ormeda said Judy tried to stab Elizabeth with a knife. Judy was only four, and Elizabeth was much older. She's saying Judy tried to murder. When it comes to Judy, I'll fight. Am I doing the right thing, Lenore?"

"Under the circumstances, I think you are." I was so furious I wondered why I left my sons pictures on the piano, but I did.

Thirty-five

## Chapter 35

# Ormeda Screams

Melba, Eula and I stood in the hot kitchen, three women married to Ormeda's three living sons. Betty had disappeared upstairs. The three of us shared the common knowledge we were not accepted in the family and never had been, or would be. Our husbands had bonded together. They had no power or say in what was ahead.

Ormeda ordered Max out of the house. All of us moved to the area by the garage where the cars were parked.

I could hear voices so I knew Paul and Betty had come down from the upstairs bedroom and were with Ormeda.

Max, using his hands to show the land he was talking about, said, "We cleaned the filth off all these hills, and look at it now. Doesn't look like it did then."

Ormeda screamed, "You boys got it divided up, yet?"

All of us turned, and there in the doorway of the farm house, was the petite form of Ormeda.

Max answered, "We haven't got it on paper yet."

We all felt terrible. It began to rain. Gene and Eula left for Ohio, Max and Melba left to go to her parents, and Jack and I went to the cabin.

I wished I had not told Max and Melba about the marihuana found in the cellar house and Debbie going to The Lounge. I had done what I thought should be stopped, talked.

Instead of playing cards, Basil, Jack and I decided to drive to a restaurant. I asked Basil, "Did Dreama ever work besides taking care of the elderly?"

"I really don't know. She says she's lived in a lot of different places."

"Jack and I moved a lot, too, when we were first married. What does her husband do?"

"I really don't know. He told me one time he didn't stay home because he couldn't stand all the men sleeping with her. One time I did some work for him. When he offered to pay, I said, 'I've already been paid.' He gave me an awful look and now I know why."

I thought, "Maybe Ormeda has some basis for telling Melba she'd better watch Max and Dreama." This made Melba mad. "Does she think I don't have what it takes to keep Max?"

"Does she drink?" I asked.

"I don't know. She used to smoke marihuana. I don't know whether she does nor or not." So the marihuana in the cellar house could have been Dreama's.

Basil and I were the losers in a game of Rook.

Monday, Jack and I stopped to say good-by to Ormeda. Helen was there. Paul and Betty were asleep upstairs. Their dog barked at us.

Jack went in to say good-by, but his mother was asleep. He returned to the kitchen where Helen and I were.

With tears in his eyes, he said to Helen, "I told Betty you're quitting. You'll have to work it out." She had no intentions of quitting, but had said it to make Jack think she was on his side.

"Tell Mama we stopped to say good-by." I knew this was tearing Jack's heart out.

I had tears in my eyes for Jack. "Tell Dreama no decisions were made at the meeting. Good- by. We'll be back."

We had depended on Basil for transportation to the cabin because of the roads. We went to his house to transfer our belongings from his truck to the Town Car.

"Betty never liked me because of the way I treated Jack when we courted." He could remember our childhood romance.

"All's fair in love and war." Basil was being kind.

"It's tit for tat, and sometimes it's more tat than tit. Oh, Basil, that was awful. I didn't know it would sound that way. I should send that to Reader's Digest." We laughed.

Jack wasn't telling me what his mother said to him. "I hope Mom dies and Betty dies two weeks later. I won't even go to Mom's funeral." Basil was hearing every word. I wanted Jack to shut up. The doctor had diagnosed Betty with Lupus disease and this was no time to talk like this.

"Don't call me if Mom dies."

"Call me, Basil. I hope I'm the one that answers the phone."

"You are two of my favorite people. I love you."

"We love you, too." I took a guinea feather as a souvenir.

We did not go straight home. We stopped to see Kathy and her family. They were sitting on the steps of their home. She turned, as if to run away.

She, too, had been hurt the Sunday after the meeting. She had heard people talking about her dad and her family. Tears streamed down her cheeks.

"I have a name for your place." She meant the cabin. She was angry. "Vultures Holler."

Jack and I did not understand. We were not there. She was hemming Ormeda's gown, and people forgot she was there.

"It's pretty bad when you have to pick on dead people, like Basil's mother and dad." We did not know what she had heard.

“Kathy, I wasn’t even there.” Jack said. I was glad we’d gone to the restaurant.

“They kept saying, ‘Jack says.’”

“I don’t know what they said, and I gave no one permission to quote me. I loved your dad. Of course, we had problems like any brothers would, but I loved him, and my boys loved him.”

“They kept talking about us being on welfare, that if they were on welfare maybe Ormeda would help them. Rebecca is not on welfare. She gets food stamps and has a Med card. She lives off the interest from her trust fund.”

“Kathy, I wouldn’t hurt you for anything.”

When we arrived, Kathy had tears. When we left, Jack and I had tears. Jack and Kathy hugged. Instead of wild daisies from the children, Kathy gave me flowers from her garden.

Thirty-six

## Chapter 36

# Pavilion or Porch

Jack and I arrived home, physically and mentally exhausted. Max and Melba visited their son in Ohio, and on their way to the airport, stopped to see us.

“Max, there is something I need to know. Had you heard about Kurt’s motorcycle before I mentioned it at the meeting?” I betrayed the person who told me if he hadn’t.

“Yes, I heard it from Debbie’s old boy friend.” So people did know. I was glad.

Max and Melba arrived just in time at the airport for their flight to Florida.

Jack answered the phone when Helen called. “I don’t want to talk to her now or ever.”

The phone rang again. I answered. It was Ormeda. “You had nose surgery, didn’t you?”

“Yes, I had skin grafted, but it didn’t take, so they put a plastic insert in my nose. I couldn’t stand it, so I had it removed.”

“Betty has gone to Glenville to see a doctor about cataract surgery for me.  
“

I did not understand the purpose of this call. Apparently she knew nothing about what had happened between Betty and I.

Jack was sixty-four on June 8, 1991. We celebrated with my two sisters and their husbands at Port Clifton. Iris served dinner, with birthday cake and ice cream. There were no cards or calls from Ormeda and Betty, that we knew.

Max’s son from Ohio, and the Boy Scout Troop for which he was the leader, would soon be at the farm. Each year they pitched their tents in the meadow and stayed a week. Each year they chose a project to help them achieve their merit badges. This year, they would build a porch on Ormeda’s house. Suddenly the plans changed. They would build a pavilion at the church.

Was this change of plans spite, after the meeting?

This would be the first time Jack and I would go to the cabin without stopping at the farm house first. Jack and I agreed this was the wise thing to do.

Jack left to take Lorna a check for the pavilion. I began mowing the lawn.

To my surprise, I see Basil in a white truck coming through the mud puddles toward the cabin.

"Hi, Basil," I greeted him. "You are so hot. Come in." We went into the cabin where the air conditioning had been on since our arrival. We talked a while. He smoked a cigarette. We moved outside and sat side by side on the steps.. He smoked another cigarette.

Basil spoke softly. "Debbie is moving. Ormeda says she is going to rent the "schoolhouse" and give Debbie the rent money to make house payments." So she wasn't going to burn it? "She also says she's going to sell timber off the farm and give the money to Debbie."

What a nice way to start our two week visit at the cabin.

"I know I shouldn't tell you this, but Kurt is a "pimp" for Debbie. I was at an auto-parts store and they were there. I heard Kurt proposition the man that works there. Debbie put her leg up and was as hot as a fire-cracker. I know for a fact Debbie and Kurt are changing partners in sex with another married couple."

I was happy to see Jack returning from Lorna's.

As usual, Jack was rude to Basil. Basil didn't stay long, explaining it was nearly eight o'clock, time for him to be at Ormeda's.

Jack and I decided it wasn't right we not see his mother. Behind Jack on the four-wheeler, clinging on to his back, we went down the muddy road. I lingered to feed a black cat I'd adopted, and Jack went on it to talk to Ormeda.

Jack didn't stay long with Ormeda. He went into the kitchen to talk to Basil.

I entered the living room. I noticed she was wearing the Mother's Day gown I'd given her, and Kathy had hemmed.

"Ormeda, I'm back."

"I thought you weren't going to come see me." She guessed our mood exactly.

"Debbie's moving. Got a nice place. Three acres or more. The children might take the cat and her babies to their new home. I know you won't care."

"Of course not. I just adopted them because I was afraid they'd be killed. I heard her in-laws are helping with the down payment on the house," I ventured to say. There was a flare of emotion in Ormeda.

"Debbie doesn't need help," and the words were forceful and defensive.

"It's about time they helped. You've helped enough," I said to get myself out of the trap.

"Betty's coming home again soon. I'm having trouble with my eyes." I had seen her dab her eye as were talking. "I used to see large black print, but now I can't even see it. I have to get a physical. Debbie will take me. Betty will come in for the surgery." She was letting us know we weren't needed.

"I had a friend that had cataract surgery and called it 'a miracle'."

I could hear Jack in the kitchen talking to Basil. "No one invited you to come here to stay with Mom, not be me, not by Max, not by Gene, and not by Betty. Helen and Dreama did not keep their word they would quit if Debbie got back in." As far as I was concerned, Debbie was not back in. She had moved and no longer had access to Ormeda's checking account. Dreama and Helen

guided Ormeda's pen along the line with their finger and Ormeda signed the checks.

"Jack will be helping at the pavilion tomorrow." unknowingly letting "the cat out of the bag".

"The what?" Ormeda sat up straighter. "What is a pavilion?"

I thought she knew the Boy Scout Troop would be building a pavilion at the church instead of a porch on her house.

"It's an open building, four poles with a roof on it."

"I hope Lorna doesn't snub the scouts away from me. They're suppose to build me a porch."

I noticed the attack on Lorna. Jack and Max had contacted her. She was hateful in the attack, so I dropped the subject.

I attended my fiftieth high school reunion at a restaurant in Glenville. The next night, Jack and I attended the Alumni Association Annual Meeting at Sand Fork. This was really the reason for being at the cabin. Gene and Eula was there, and spent the night with us.

Sunday after church, we ate at a restaurant with Jack's relatives.

Jack and I began work at the cabin. We hauled rocks and made a wall which would make a waterfall when it rained. I cleared debris from both sides of the stream. The beauty was applauding when it rained, and the water flowed smoothly down the stream and over the rocks.

Ormeda sprang her ankle, and Basil carried her to the car. Dreama, Helen and Jennifer went with her for her first physical. Even though we were alienated, we were kind enough to find out the results.

"They checked me from head to toe. I told them they hurt my "tits" when they tried to lift me up. The surgery will let me see right in front, but not too much to the side. Betty will be in two weeks when I have my surgery."

Everything was right where it was a year and half ago. Ormeda was going to have cataract surgery and Betty was coming to take her.

The longer Jack and I stayed, the more bits of information came to us. Betty told Debbie it was best to move when Debbie asked about it. When Debbie wanted the job of taking care of Ormeda, Betty said, "No family member should be paid for that." Basil said Ormeda had nearly a hundred thousand dollars in the bank, she had showed him her check book and wanted him to know it. Dreama's friends had bought The Lounge and were going to remodel it and make it a private club.

As always with Ormeda, the subject was Debbie. "I wish Debbie's back didn't hurt."

"I hope her tail bone goes through her head," Jack answered. "Don't ever talk to me about Debbie or Betty again. I get tired of hearing about them." It was sickening.

I visited Ormeda and Helen alone the next morning. The laundry was on the line. Helen was in the kitchen making potato salad. Ormeda's leg was elevated on the chair.

"Hello, Helen. Thought I'd run down and see you."

"I'm making potato salad. Thought it would be good to eat on a hot day. A man's coming to build a porch or deck and put a ramp in for a wheel chair. Betty also wanted him to take out the bath tub and put in a walk-in shower, but Ormeda is objecting." This was exactly what Jack had wanted to do.

"I'm going in to see Ormeda."

"Jack wants me to fix a lie he told. I can't even remember what it is. Something with Max. I am not doing so well."

"I can't help you with the lie. Jack has such a sense of humor. It's two-sided. One is the stories or jokes he tells. The other is saying he won't do something when he intends to. I wish I could show you what we're doing at the cabin." I was sincere. She had been so interested in the man-made waterfall. She had never been to the cabin, nor had she ever expressed a desire to go.

"I couldn't see anyway," she laughed.

Jack and I were discouraged about the work we were doing at the cabin. Gene and Eula, partners, told us they were not going to do anything more to the cabin, let the next generation do it. At our age, we had no time to wait. This meant we would work and keep everything up until the next generation was ready to assume responsibility. We could make no improvements since money would be shared equally. I was ready to sell or buy them out. This was the best option to me.

It was July 2, 1991, our forty-second anniversary. I was discouraged, ready to say "to hell with it all". I went and had my hair done, and we ate at a restaurant. We drank champagne, my first.

I was proud of my work, the rock waterfall, the flared entrance to the cabin and the creek with the willows trimmed. Jack was waiting for the Boy Scouts to arrive and the materials for the pavilion to be delivered. He wanted to stand guard so none of them would be stolen.

On his way, he visited Ormeda. "Love is what started all the problems. Helen showed me the check book. I tried to get it away from Debbie without hurting anyone. Count what you have given Debbie besides what she has taken."

"I'd like to give her the money from the timber."

"That's my inheritance. The first log that's taken out, I will have a court order to have it stopped."

"Don't believe everything you hear." That ended it.

The Boy Scouts worked on the pavilion. As if to say, "I'll show you", the wood for Ormeda's porch was delivered.

Dreama and I heard the pounding of the church. She was curious about the meeting.

"Betty set the mood for the meeting when she said, 'What do you have to hide from Mother?' This put a guilt trip on us all. We had nothing to hide but did want her to know about Debbie."

"Was it just screaming at each other?" Apparently this was what she had heard.

"Well, we didn't come to decisions like I thought we would. Jack and I left early, so I don't know all that happened."

"What about Kathy leaving mad?"

“That was the next day. We weren’t there.”

“I know Ormeda is really mad at Melba. She doesn’t like her.”

“I don’t know Melba as well as I do Eula. She always lived far away. I did mention that Helen and you would like to know the decisions we made. Betty said, ‘Why do they have to know?’ Max said, ‘Because they work here.’ Did you get your Social Security?”

“Yes. I thought we might get a raise. Do you know what we make? Four dollars an hour. Then it was mostly hashing over the past?” Dreama concluded.

“Max and Gene said they worked hard on the farm and that Junior was protected because he had polio. You and I would’ve protected him, too.”

I thought I handled it well. Jack thought I told too much. I had not mentioned the will, the name of the farm or the tombstone, the big conflicts. I had not mentioned the bad language and mud-slinging. I had been polite.

Ray was celebrating his twenty-seventh birthday alone at home. I remembered Bob’s joy of having a baby brother when he was born. My oldest sister was with me.

I sat alone at the cabin. It was a beautiful sunny day. I tried to enjoy the sounds of the buzzing insects and chirping birds, but my desire to see Ray would not go away. I missed him. At church Sunday, I gave a donation of twenty-seven dollars to honor his birthday.

Jack and I went to the Court House and got a copy of Betty’s Power of Attorney. To Jack’s surprise Betty’s second husband, Paul, was to serve, if for any reason Betty couldn’t. I did not want Jack to mention this to his mother.

“Do you know what you’ve done, Mom? You’ve put Paul ahead of your three sons. You’re sick. Do you know how that makes me feel? Do you? I’d like to have that Power of Attorney published in the Glenville Democrat to let everyone know what you think of your sons. I know you had Jimmy, Max and Gene to spite Dad. I’m not sure why you had me, because you had to. This is sick.” Jack ranted. I looked at a magazine.

The pavilion at the church was finished. The Boy Scouts left a plaque nailed to the side of the pavilion in recognition of their Boy Scout Troop from Ohio, 1991. The porch at Ormeda’s was beginning to take shape, both pavilion and porch larger than I thought they would be. Who paid for the porch, Ormeda or Betty? I knew Jack, Max, and Cliff paid for the pavilion.

Thirty-seven

## Chapter 37

# The Brown Package

What did Ormeda know? Did she know the Boy Scouts could not earn a merit award unless the project was one of community service? Was it really a spite thing from Max?

Jack and I did not stop to tell Ormeda about the family reunion. I was sure others would. I enjoyed eating across from Elizabeth's twin boys. The reunion was a success even though Jack and I were no longer leaders.

I was left alone while Jack went to deliver a check to a neighbor that had removed the root of the silver maple from our property at Sand Fork.

I saw him coming up the dusty road on the four-wheeler. He had something brown under his arm. He handed the brown package to me. I saw it was pictures from the piano, a picture of Betty and him, when he was a soldier, and pictures of our sons. I remembered how I felt and the pride I had when I gave those pictures to Ormeda. One of Bob, his graduating picture, and one of Ray, blonde, with curly hair smiling, in a large oval frame. I noticed tears in Jack's eyes. Tears were running down my cheeks. I knew for whatever reason, Jack was right. It still hurt.

"The only thing Mom said to me was that Jennifer was having a good time in D. C. My sons don't have to be there on display with them." I knew Ormeda again was pushing Debbie and Jennifer down Jack's throat. Either intentionally or unintentionally, she always did this.

Removing the pictures cut deep into our feelings. It was a reminder of the way we had been removed from Ormeda's life by her, and now our sons.

Jack and I promised each other we'd stay away, and not make any contact with anyone at the farm. We stopped at the Court House. Jack wanted a copy of his mother and father's marriage certificate. He had figured it up on a brown envelope in the car, he was born seven and one half months after their marriage. Quietly, I waited for his reaction.

"That may have been why they abused me." After a long silence, he said, "She must have been a scared little girl. Wonder if she thought of aborting me?"

For three weeks, Jack and I kept our promise not to call. Jack called Aunt Vi. The surgery had been delayed two days. It had gone well. She was seeing

white, which was normal. Ormeda did not have the sight she thought she would. Betty had not come.

When Gene and Eula visited, we decided we would wait two years until their kids were out of college to sell the cabin. This would give them a fair chance at buying our half. It seemed the right thing to do.

Lorna called. Basil was walking with a cane because his back hurt. If he went to his friend's funeral in Ohio, Tessie would stay at night with Ormeda. Dreama and Helen were working longer hours to be with Ormeda after her surgery. Her vision was not much improved. She had been out on the porch.

Jack and I did not go to the church reunion.

Thirty-eight

## Chapter 38

# Lenore's Sixty-Six

I awoke. I was sixty-six years old today, August 3, 1991. I thought about the day I was born and how Mother must have been happy to have a little girl to play with Iris. I remembered she searched for a name for me, before choosing Lenore. I was now the baby of the family, the fourth. I thought of Justine two years later, replacing me as the baby, placing me fourth out of five. I felt loved, important, and secure.

Jack interrupted my thoughts. "Let's get out of here. Check to see if Ray wants us to bring him anything to eat." We dressed and took Ray a whopper and fries.

We stopped at Sedlak's to look at furniture. A receptionist gave us a map to use as we toured the store.

We looked at roll-top desks. Jack wanted to make one in his wood shop. "We have to get rid of a lot of stuff, and Aunt Molly's stuff."

"Why do you want to get rid of my inheritance?" I asked.

"Go to hell. I knew this was how you were feeling." He tore up the map and crammed it toward me. I couldn't believe I'd been told to go to hell on my birthday.

"Take me home. I want to go home." He swerved at another car, leaned forward to curse at the driver, and I said, "Tell him to go to hell like you did me."

The bumper sticker on the truck jolted us. It read, "Go to the Church of your Choice".

"How can I go to any church?" I asked.

"Happy Birthday, Lenore." he said.

"I'll try to make it a good one," and I remembered last year at the cabin with our Christian friends.

Jack swerved the car over in the middle of our front yard, got out, slammed the door and went in the house.

"I'll be back," and I left for K-Mart with a paper place mat. It was special because Justine and I were given them at a restaurant. I wanted to frame it. On the mat, were the words:

Live for Today  
Dream for Tomorrow  
Learn from Yesterday

I couldn't get a frame. I gave the mat to a black girl behind me in line.

I went home and went to bed. Jack plopped a box at the foot of the bed.

Jack left. Ray came home. "You can do the dishes. Today's my birthday."

I teased.

Ray turned and hugged me, a hug I needed so much. Taking my face in his hands, and looking me straight in the eye, he said, "Happy Birthday". He sang the Happy Birthday song.

I cut the string around the box with a knife. Inside in a gold frame with a blue mat, was the place mat.

Live for Today  
Dream for Tomorrow  
Learn from Yesterday

Justine and Junior had sent it for my birthday. I cried. I was thankful, too, for Ray's simple expression of love.

I ate a bologna sandwich. In my mind, I made plans to sell Aunt Molly's furniture.

Thirty-nine

## Chapter 39

# Betty's Plan

I opened my birthday cards, but would not open the letter addressed to Jack from Betty in Colorado. I thought it was a copy of the will she promised to send.

It was not the will, but a request for money to be returned. She listed five repairs and improvements she wanted to make at the farm house. Betty, using psychology, played upon family ties before attacking the main issues.

“Just a note to let you know how Mother is doing, with three trips to the doctor, she had the surgery on her right eye, the worst one. She had a lens implant and the cataract removed. They indicate if she indeed improves it will take up to three weeks. She now sees colors and distinct darks and lights. We will schedule the left eye later. She told me Eula had called her and she was happy to hear from her.”

Betty asked for fifteen thousand dollars to be returned to Ormeda by Max, Jack and she. Gene was not involved since Jack and she had covered the legal costs for him since he had two kids in college. This was money Ormeda received for drilling damage for the oil wells and had been used for legal services to force the drilling. The five thousand dollars she wanted back was the money Jack had in an account for Ormeda to be used for emergency purposes only.

The letter was signed, “Sincerely, Sis.” At the bottom was “c: To permanent record of Ormeda Marks.”

Jack was furious. I was, too.

Gene called. He had taken it personally that he was unable to pay his share.

Max called. “I went to the mailbox expecting to get a letter with a six thousand dollar check and instead got this son-of-a-bitch letter.” He had Power of Attorney when these payments were made and was furious Betty was questioning what he had done. Jack and I knew he did it with Ormeda's approval.

Jack listened as Max read the letter he was sending to Betty. He would not return the money since it was received when he had Power of Attorney and with Ormeda's approval. However, he would share in the expense of fixing up the farmhouse if she followed certain guidelines.. She would have to get three estimates from licensed General Contractors submitted. The contractors would

have to be bonded and insured and have workman's comp. It would have to be approved by him. If the cost exceeded twenty percent of the appraised value, he suggested "exploring the possibility of putting Ormeda in a controlled facility to provide the necessary care and comfort you are seeking."

Jack decided to forget the letter. File it under "Asshole", and wrote the word across the top of Betty's letter. I filed it under "West Virginia Real Estate".

A copy of Max's letter arrived. It said much of what he told Jack on the phone. With it was a personal letter to Jack and Gene.

"Dear Elizabeth," not "Dear Sis". After he gave the guidelines for fixing up the house, he wrote, "To infer I took money might come back to haunt you". He ended, "Take note that your intentions seem honorable enough, however the economics of your intentions show a lack of responsibility.."

The personal letter to Jack and Gene was humorous. "Ain't life wonderful? With a great, big wonderful sister like ours, who has decided to build a Royles Royce out of an empty Campbell Soup can." He was referring to the farm house. "My intentions are to answer this one letter and I have completely scrubbed my hands of the farm. What ever I get out of the surface I will deed to NAACP."

Max mailed another letter to Betty about Ormeda's competency and the legality of her Power of Attorney. He wondered how his dad had lived with Ormeda all these years.

I was confused. I thought Betty had good intentions, but had gone about it in the wrong way, from the beginning. She had this coming, but I felt sorry for her.

Eula called. They were waiting for an answer to their letter to Betty. They were interested in seeing a lawyer.

Jack got an appointment with Ray Rexroad in Buckhannon, W. Va. on August 17th. The trip would be hurried since Bob was stopping to visit on his way from Seattle to D. C.

Eula told me. "Gene was very upset when he got Betty's letter. He didn't sleep that night. I transferred a thousand dollars and he mailed a check to Betty since he said she was collecting money Ormeda had given as gifts. Ormeda gave each of our kids five hundred dollars for college. We spent half of it. We're waiting to see what happens. He told his mom he'd never be home again."

"Betty won't cash the check," I said. "Thank you for the birthday card with a pig on it."

Jack, Gene, Eula and I made a list of questions we would ask the lawyer. Eula gave Jack a copy of his dad's handwritten will. It was witnessed by Junior, Jack and Max. Jack was named Administrator of the will but was unable to serve because he lived out of state. Ormeda had been named Administrator. Jack did not know this. Max discussed the questions with Max.

Communication with Betty would be through the lawyer. Emotions were too strong.

## Chapter 40

# The Lawyer

Jack and I anticipated meeting Mr. Rexroad at one o'clock on Friday, in Buckhannon, W. Va. We left early, and checked in at Super-8 Motel in Westlake. We met Gene and Eula and walked to Mr. Rexroad's office.

The door was locked. We waited. We could see his secretary inside. Jack shook the handle on the door and she let us in.

The office was new, decorated with huge, brown leather chairs and empty bookcases. Crystal panels were in the door and divider. The blonde haired secretary told us "Mr. Rexroad is at a meeting. I tried to call you and the young man who answered said you had already left. I called all the motels in Buckhannon and couldn't find you." We stayed in Westlake.

Empty looks were exchanged between Jack and Gene. "You mean he won't be here. We drove six hours and stayed at a motel to keep this appointment," Jack said.

"I'm sorry. Let me see if I can get him." She called on the phone. She couldn't. "He can see you at three thirty."

"I can't wait. I'm meeting my son at the airport at nine o'clock."

Gene and Eula said they could come back.

I swelled with pride when I saw Bob getting off the airplane, professional looking, wearing a dark suit and carrying a briefcase. It was the first time we had seen each other since the massage with George. I took hold of his arm, and began talking, talking. We walked toward the car. He did not sit up front with his dad as usual, but climbed in the back seat. George was never mentioned. The strain was present. He was careful not to take sides in the conversation between Jack and I. He was careful to make sure I was included. He was not completely relaxed. I had caused this stress on the family through innocence and ignorance. I knew his visit was boring and disappointing. We celebrated his forty-first birthday with dinner, cake, and ice cream. I would always love Bob and his family. I was sorry I had been the cause of feelings we could not understand or erase. Three days, and he was gone on the airplane, back to Seattle.

As soon as Bob's plane was off the ground, we went to Gene and Eula's to

get the lawyer input.

Yes, we did have a life estate. Their father's will was poorly done and could be interpreted in several ways, but it had been probated.

Only maintenance, not capital improvements could be made on the farm house unless all agreed. Ormeda could not designate or apportion to any one person, and if any one person was not satisfied with the division of the property, that person could request it be sold at the court house.

Betty, as Power of Attorney, could rent the "schoolhouse" and charge "a penny to \$500-."

Jack and Gene had no right-of-way to the cabin. Our property was land-locked.

Betty could not serve as Power of Attorney and Administrator of Ormeda's will.

As we drove home, Jack was determined he would buy the farm at the Court House steps if he had "to use his half of our monies and sell our home in Ohio." I did not want the headaches the farm would bring. I understood Jack's thoughts and feelings.

## Chapter 41

# Friends in the South

There was much unrest. Confusion was everywhere. Civil war was a possibility. President Gorbachev was under house arrest in Crimea. President Bush announced aid from the United States would be discontinued.

Boris Yeltsin made giant political gains for his stand against the coup and defiance to the military surrounding his headquarters. Thousands of Russian supporters of Yeltsin had filled the square and helped defeat the coup with only three lives lost.

With Yeltsin's political gains and Gorbachev being absent, and it being Gorbachev's appointees who conducted the coup. Yeltsin became an equal partner in the leadership. He was probably the cause of the dismantlement of the Communist party in the USSR. He contributed to the independence of other republics.

Gorbachev, on August 24, 1991, resigned his position as General Secretary of the Communist party and requested it be dissolved as a party.

Of the people that organized the coup, one committed suicide, one was under guard at a hospital, and six were under arrest.

On August 26, Gorbachev's military advisor committed suicide. Twelve organizers of the coup were charged with high treason.

On Labor Day week-end, September 3, 1991, President Bush announced recognition of the independence of the Baltic States from the Soviet Union, even though Gorbachev had not made that announcement yet. The Baltics had not been free since 1940.

The Soviet Union was dissolved, the Soviet Union I and millions of other had studied in school, no longer existed. The Communist Party had not died easily. Democracy was moving into the U.S.S.R. slowly and cautiously, pushing Communism to the background.

Leningrad, a city in Russia, was returned to its original name, St. Paulsburg. Statues of Communistic leaders were torn down and destroyed. What Hitler had done was being undone.

Jack and I kept our appointment with the dermatologist. I checked out all right. The dermatologist told Jack, "Cancer". A skin biopsy would be sent

for processing and analysis to the Cleveland Skin Pathology Laboratory. The report would come in seven days.

“What a blessing,” I told Jack, meaning he had an early diagnosis. He did not want to tell Bob and worry him.

Ormeda celebrated her eighty-eighth birthday on September 20, 1991. She, too, had skin cancer. A biopsy from a knot on her arm resulted in minor surgery the day before her birthday. Dreama washed the wound with soap and water, and put antibiotic ointment on it.

Betty came in from Colorado. Jack did not call his mother on her birthday because Paul or Betty would answer. Ormeda’s birthday came and went. We did not recognize it in any way.

The results from the test was low-grade cancer.

With a strange silence, Jack and I accepted the diagnosis. I dressed the tiny, pea-sized wound in the middle of his back. He scheduled minor surgery after our trip to North Carolina, twenty days away.

Jack called Lorna. Betty had gone to see a lawyer while she was home. Debbie had refused to let Betty have the keys to the “schoolhouse” and Betty said, “I’ll break the door in.” I thought this was funny since Betty had Power of Attorney. The church would have a Halloween party at the pavilion. After the call Jack said to me, “I’m responsible for this whole mess.”

Jack and I started our trip South at the end of September. Our first stop would be at my friend’s house that had sung at my wedding forty years ago. North Carolina was beautiful. Ruth was diabetic, so we ate three healthy meals a day and took long walks for exercise. We went to Tar Landing on the Atlantic Ocean for three days. They were active in the church choir and we enjoyed hearing them practice.

Our second stop was in Florida at the home of Jack’s double first cousin. Buttons, their blind dog, was an important part of the family. Helen showed us pictures of her legs where they had been cut to remove veins when she had angio-plastic surgery. Then she showed me her legs after healing. I had never seen such butchery and her legs were ugly and disfigured. She accepted this was necessary to save her life. I told her about the farm, even the marihuana tales, and why we had taken a stand against Debbie.

After a visit of three days, we left for Jupiter, Florida, to visit Max and Melba. We listened to the harassment case against Judge Thomas by Anita Hill, a professor at Oklahoma University.

Max had been on Jack’s “shit list” for a year and a half. Looking old and tired, he met us at Shoney’s. The three of us drove to a three-bedroom apartment in Clearwater, Florida.

A letter arrived from Mr. Rexroad with a copy of a letter from Betty enclosed.

Max and Jack did not care. They had a boat chartered and they were going fishing. Melba and I went shopping and bought long, dangling earrings.

Max said, “This is war, war between Betty and me, war between Betty and Jack, and war between Betty and Gene.” What he meant was each of them would fight their own battle.

Betty's letter to Mr. Rexroad was summarized.

Paragraph 1: Betty explained to Mr. Rexroad she had Power of Attorney for Ormeda Marks, her mother, and that she had been misinformed about monies.

Paragraph 2: Betty explained she was representing Ormeda's interests to the best of her ability.

Paragraph 3: Betty outlined her plan to maintain and improve the house.

Paragraph 4: Betty demanded money that was Ormeda's to be paid in thirty days and the five thousand Jack held be transferred to the United National Bank within fifteen days, account number 500-099783.

I did not like the word "demand" since Betty had very emphatically pointed out at the June 1st meeting we lived in a democracy.

Jack and Max took action.

## Chapter 42

# Action

since the June meeting, three and a half months ago. His mother, dear old Ormeda, eighty-eight years old now, knew nothing of Betty's plan to improve to house or the request for money from Max and Jack. Max and Jack decided they had been playing right into Betty's hands when they did not contact their mother. This had given Betty the opportunity to proceed as she chose. Max explained to Mr. Rexroad the surface of the farm originally was acquired through inheritance and purchase. He explained he would deal with Ormeda's needs directly. He asked Betty be told Ormeda shared Power of Attorney and if she needed money to rent the "schoolhouse". Any improvements on the house would be at Betty's expense.

Jack faxed Mr. Rexroad a copy of his father's will, a debit-credit ledger of the monies in question and asked him "to sit on the money as long as he could".

Returning from our trip South, we visited Justine and Junior's son in the hospital. He had surgery on his elbow. We stopped to visit my other sister and arrived home in time for Jack's cancer surgery on his back. The minor surgery was done in the doctor's office.

Clarence Thomas was voted in as Justice of the Supreme Court. Anita Hill's testimony about being sexually harassed had not swayed the vote of the Senate Judiciary enough and the people of the United States continued to debate. Who was telling the truth and who wasn't? A consciousness of job sexual harassment had been created.

Dreama called. It had been three months since we'd heard from anyone at the farm.

"We think loggers are taking trees off your mother's property."

"Call Betty." Jack told her. I told her about Jack's skin cancer.

Later, I called Dreama. "Your call was a surprise and I was conscious we were spending Ormeda's money on the call." She told me Debbie and the girls looked happy. She had returned the key to the "schoolhouse". She said she had a home and a job now and owed no one anything. She was manager at a day care center.

Dreama said she was going to visit her mother. Her husband had recently

been diagnosed with one hundred per cent disability from black lung. She had been to visit her son in jail. He had moved to better facilities. She thought if Ormeda ever needed a nurse, she could handle it.

It was a dreary, cool, autumn Sunday in late October. I sensed Jack was glad I was leaving to shop.

Jack called and asked a neighbor of Ormeda's to check the trees and he would "make it worthwhile" to him. Then he called his mother, the first time since the meeting. He changed the subject when she began talking about Debbie and Jennifer. He told her he got a lawyer to keep Betty off his back. The four months silence between mother and son was broken.

Two weeks of Indian summer passed, the leaves on the trees their most vibrant colors. The northerly winds and the wintry effect of Lake Erie would soon arrive. Almost overnight, temperatures setting record lows in early November, were here. Winter clothes appeared on people venturing out. Heavier blankets were put on beds for the cold nights.

On Nov. 6, 1991, news arrived that the last of the 732 Kuwait oil well fires set by Iraq soldiers had been extinguished. Production would not resume its normal level for three years. Jack approved a letter Mr. Rexroad prepared to send Betty. On November 8, 1991, the day before my mother's ninety-fifth birthday had she lived, a letter from Mr. Rexroad arrived. Enclosed was a copy of the letter he mailed Betty.

In the letter to Jack, Mr. Rexroad gave the formula for distribution of money under West Virginia Code Chapter 43, Article 2, Section 2 through 3. Jack understood.

The letter to Betty was in answer to her letter of September twenty-third. It was dated November 5, 1991.

Mr. Rexroad stated he "had spoken to Max and Jack".

The letter continued, "First, I am informed that all monies collected on behalf of Ormeda Marks and/or Marks heirs has been fully paid out and nothing remains to be disbursed with the exception of an account which your brother maintains for his and his mother's benefit. However, your brothers wish to tend to any needs of their mother of which they may be informed but do not wish to go through you or any other relative to do so."

Mr. Rexroad also stated Betty did not have exclusive Power of Attorney and that Ormeda can and has made decisions.

"My clients strongly recommend that the schoolhouse property be offered for rent as several people desire to rent it. However, their niece, Debbie, has failed to remove her belongings from said property and this is costing Mrs. Marks her income."

He stated "improvements on the house beyond those Mrs. Marks desires to pay for herself would be made at your own expense if you direct them to be made."

Lastly, the letter stated, "Max asked for a release of any liens which may have been created by the unauthorized construction of a deck and Max is legitimately concerned about your ability to perform such construction and render professional services".

The letter ended, "You may feel free to contact me if you wish to reply".

Mr. Rexroad had professionally expressed Jack and Max's views.

Max called and told Jack he planned to use the formula Mr. Rexroad gave him and "dun" Debbie for monies she owed him for living in the "schoolhouse" all those years. He wanted his share of his dad's life estate.

Forty-three

## Chapter 43

# Max's Turn

Thanksgiving was a few days away. Debbie was not preparing Thanksgiving dinner at Ormeda's.

Jack was going deer hunting with his cousins. He was backing down again on his threat to never return. I secretly did not think he should go. He was having chest pains and I thought he would talk too much and tell things he shouldn't.

I knew it would cause a lot of extra trouble for Jack, but I did not want him to put a hitch on the Town Car. He was disappointed and angry. This meant Ray would take the four-wheeler to Parkersburg with the Jimmy, his cousin would take it from there to the farm. Ray would return home with the Jimmy to DJ.

I was home alone when Max called. He mailed a letter to Debbie and was sending a copy to his mother, Gene and Jack.

"Misty I open it when it comes?"

"Yes, go ahead."

The letter arrived on a cold, dreary Tuesday, November 25th. Jack had not called so I had no way of telling him his mother would receive a copy. I opened it.

There was a cover letter to Jack, a copy of the letter he sent his mother, and one he'd sent Kurt and Debbie. Max had spent hours on this. He had made a chart of expenditures for use of the "schoolhouse", first for his brother, and then for Debbie and her family.

Max asked Jack to mail each of Junior's heirs a check for \$389.25 , their portion of the right- of -way and well site damages on the farm. This would come from the money Jack had.

In Max's letter to his mother, he explained the life estate will of his father and what it meant.

He said Jack was mailing the checks to the girls.

To Kurt and Debbie, he calculated at two hundred dollars a month rent for the "schoolhouse", they owed each of his brothers and Betty \$1,786.68 and owed Ormeda \$17,866.67. He asked that immediate attention be given this in

sixty days. He ended, "Junior's estate now owes to the remainder of the heirs \$3,520.00."

I waited for Jack to call.

Thanksgiving Day I was preparing dinner for Ray and I. I wanted it to be special since Ray had been alone for three years on this day. He worked. Dinner was served at 3:30.

My grandson called and told me Bob was home from Singapore and Tokyo. He was resting from jet lag.

It was late on Thanksgiving Day when Jack called. He was alone with Ormeda.

"Mom had a smothering spell two nights ago. Her head is going to one side more, probably because of the way she sleeps on the sofa. I spent most of the time cooking and washing dishes, didn't go on the hill. I visit Mom when no one else is here. Betty did not come. I bought four stoves with safety valves for Mom, paid \$1,706.39, and put them on the Discover card. They'll be installed Monday."

"I waited for your call. I thought you forgot us." I understood there was no phone at the cabin and he had to call from Ormeda's. "I wanted you to call because there's a letter here from Max. He mailed a copy to your mother and Debbie."

"Mom and I don't talk about Debbie, Paul or Betty. These are off subjects for us. Mom said all we do is sit here and say, 'I love you' to each other. I did hear her say Max is after money from Debbie."

I read a part of each letter to him over the phone. He thought Mr. Rexroad should mail the checks to the girls and ask me to tell Max about the stoves.

"I sold the gold sofa. The woman was so happy to get it. Remember Mr. Trivision, the gym teacher. He died."

Max was glad to hear from me. I first told him Jack had bought stoves for their mother. "Rebecca might move in the "schoolhouse" on the first of December."

"That's a bunch of shit. I'll stop that. I'll go to the sheriff. I have to stand up to what I said to keep my honor." I knew he was referring to rent and a lease being required.

"Max, I have to remember you are an adult. I remember when you and Junior and Gene were just little boys. Sometimes I forget you're adults. You have to do what you think is right."

"We're all adults. I'll call Mom Sunday." He gave me Debbie's new address and told me his daughter came in fourth at state level in debating. "Kathy wants to represent all the girls. She wants to get papers signed. I think that would be good."

"I do too." I had done what Jack asked me to do.

In a letter to Alesia, I wrote, "I want to write because when Jack comes home tomorrow, it'll be like a cyclone hit." The cyclone hit. Jack was at the door, home a day early. We hugged. I read the words in my letter, and we laughed.

"You're home early."

“I got homesick after we talked on the phone. Couldn’t believe it.”

He woke Max with a phone call. “Thought I’d check in with you. I got Mom four stoves. Yes, Rebecca’s moving in the “schoolhouse”. Told Mom it’d just be a warehouse. Her kids have different fathers. Trying to get child support for that second one from a different man than her husband. Mom said she didn’t want the little ones to be cold. Mom won’t be with us long. Had that smothering spell. Her feet are swollen again. She will get a flu shot this week.”

Jack went on talking. “Know that gate just as you go into the property Gene and I own? They’re going to drill an oil well fifty feet from the gate and one on the hill. I pulled up the surveying stakes. They made our property look awful. They didn’t have permission to survey. It will draw all the oil and gas from under Mom’s property. I talked to Basil Smith about it, and he said they didn’t drill because there wasn’t anything there. He wrote down a reminder he’d do all he could to help us.”

“I give him three days to act, friendly business and then I’ll lower the boom.”

While Max and Jack talked, I was thinking. “Jack, how can you buy stoves and put them in? Aren’t you doing the same thing Betty did, that made us so mad? You didn’t talk it over with the others. Max outlined guidelines for Betty to follow if she did anything to the farmhouse. Don’t that mean you would have to follow them, too?”

I knew this would make Jack mad, and it did, but he called Max the second time.

They would get copies of the bill of sales and mail one to each of the eight people involved. They also would send a waiver of lien to each.

Jack glared at me as he tried to explain. “It’s different, Lenore. Betty was asking for money from us. I paid for the stoves. I may use Mom’s money, I don’t know yet. This isn’t a permanent improvement to the house. Mom wants Ray to come see her. She really wants to see you.”

Tears came to my eyes. “I don’t want her hurt again. She’s been hurt too much.”

Jack was beginning to understand.

“She’s read three books since her surgery and new glasses. She told me Dad had everything tied up with his will. She can’t do a thing. She said the lawyer told her she couldn’t sell the timber.”

I thought, “So that’s what stopped her.” Betty must have seen a lawyer for her.

“I ask Mom to call Max. Hard feelings have existed since June. She called, but it backfired. Bad feelings flared up again when the oil and gas leases were mentioned. I wished I had not ask Mom to call him. We got thousands of dollars because of what Max did. I told her that.

“Mom doesn’t think too well. The wells being drilled at the cabin was probably the freshest thing on her mind. I told Max Mom doesn’t need to be hurt.”

Jack and Max agreed Betty was costing them money in lawyer fees and others should get their own lawyers. They relied on them to get the information and pass it on to them.

Dreama called. Ormeda wanted to know the price of the stoves. She wanted to give the money to Ray. She had told Ormeda buying the stoves was something Jack wanted to do. Had she done the right thing?"

"You have done right," I assured her. I thought about the five thousand dollars and that Jack might use that money. Either way, it was something Jack wanted to do.

Forty-four

## Chapter 44

# Overnight at Ormeda's

I watched the rape trial of William Kennedy Smith in West Palm Beach, Florida on TV. The trial began on December second with a five woman, four man jury and was to last days. I was behind in preparations for Christmas only twenty days away.

I mailed Bob and Monika their Christmas packages. I knew I'd be having colon x-rays.

Jack was busy with Ormeda's affairs. Mr. Rexroad wrote the checks for Junior's heirs, which made them a legal document, and would be deducted from the five thousand he had of Ormeda's. Then for no reason, he called the contractor for the tub enclosures Betty was to have installed, and told him if he wasn't going to do it, he would. He also said Betty was not getting money she expected, he and Max would see to that.

The colon x-rays were as I had heard my mother describe years ago, messy and embarrassing. I was eager to get results.

Max and Jack asked Betty for a "Waiver of Lien" on the deck. She had not sent them one. If they sent her a "Waiver of Lien" on the stoves, it was fair and would be a reminder to her. Copies were mailed to those involved. Max wrote, "We don't want the items loaned, given, or stolen by anyone....I want everything done to the house to become a part of the estate." The five thousand dollar account was to be closed, spent on the house.

Jack transferred money to our checking account to pay for the stoves.

December 7, 1991 and it was the fiftieth anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the beginning of World War II, that lasted four years. I remembered my brothers and the sadness it brought to our family. Japan, past and present, was being reviewed on TV. Sadness lingered.

I arrived home from shopping. Debbie had called. Debbie? Ormeda had fallen and there was an ambulance on its way to take her to the hospital for x-rays. Ormeda had said, "Call Jack."

Jack and I left immediately, a day earlier than we had planned. It was important I go, since Ormeda had said to bring me. We stayed at a motel and arrived Sunday morning.

Ormeda was on the sofa. Dreama was in the kitchen and Helen was dusting. Jack looked at the new stoves. I sat by Ormeda. "How are you?"

"No bones broken. Glad I'll be able to get to the bathroom. Sore. Have pain here," and she put her hand on her left knee. I saw the cancer sore from the surgery on her left hand. The sore was inflamed with pus in the middle. It had not healed as well as Jack's, but she was pleased so I kept quiet. I told her about our trip south and our visit with Helen and Max. She loved Helen, and was grateful to her for taking care of her husband when he was dying of cancer.

Dreama and Helen looked tired. I walked into the kitchen where they were washing the dishes together.

Dreama said, "We're beat, after yesterday. Didn't even have time to eat." She kept on working. "Ormeda will need two people to lift her." She described the fall, the wait at the hospital, the overcrowded waiting room with Kathy, Debbie, Rebecca and the children, and finally that a more accurate reading of the x-rays would be made.

"You and Jack are staying here, aren't you? We have changed the beds and they are ready for you. You can sleep upstairs or downstairs."

"How kind," I thought. "You'll have to ask Jack." I knew Jack's feelings after never being asked to return. I knew the smoke from Ormeda's cigarettes bothered him.

Dreama looked Jack straight in the eyes. "Jack, your mother needs two people to lift her. Basil age might be able to do it, but it would be better if you and Lenore would spend the night. We're beat, and need to get away for a while."

Jack's answer was harsh, insensitive, but with principal. "I can't stay. Mom has refused help from Lenore and I don't want to put Lenore through that again. Anyway, if something happened, Betty would sue me." He again had put his decision back to me. I did not like this.

Dreama said, disgusted, "We'll have to see who we can get."

We sat down to eat hot beef stew I had brought.

I felt bad. I helped Dreama and Helen carry thing to their cars. When I returned, Jack said, "It's my place to help. I really should. I'll call Helen and tell her I'll stay."

Ormeda ate corn bread with chicken gravy. I gave her a box of goodies I had brought her for Christmas. "I don't eat sweets." What did I expect? I suggested she serve them to company.

Debbie and her two daughters appeared from nowhere. They did not speak to me and I did not speak to them. Their attention, exaggerated, was on Ormeda. I quietly watched. After fifteen minutes, Jennifer's eyes met mine. She said, "Hi". I waved my hand. Jack tried to be jovial and enter the conversation, but made a fool of himself for doing it. He was not accepted and they let him know it.

I noticed the gray in Debbie's long, black hair. Jennifer gave her grandmother a dilapidated overstuffed dog with an ear missing. "This is to keep you company, Grandma, when I'm not with you." Never was any friendliness shown Jack and I.

Jack and I slept downstairs, where Basil usually slept. It was too hot. The smoke from Ormeda's cigarettes floated toward us, although she smoked fewer cigarettes that night.

Early, before daylight, I was in the kitchen talking to Helen. She was there for the early work shift. She fixed Ormeda Tang and coffee, gave her medicine and a pain pill.

Privately I told Jack, "We should go home. I have a sore throat. "

Looking down at his petite, blue-eyed mother, he said, "Everything's under control here. We're going home. Tell Betty to get off my back. She's in a no-win situation with Max and I."

Sincere, definite, and with meaning, Ormeda answered, "I'll tell her. I'll do just that."

"Merry Christmas, Ormeda, and Happy New Year. We made it to 1992." I hugged her.

Forty-five

## Chapter 45

# Good-bye, Hello

Jack and I put the suitcases in the kitchen. The phone rang and it was Dreama.

“Ormeda does have a knee fracture. She will need twenty-four hour care for six to eight weeks. Lucy Miller is lending us a hospital bed free of charge. Lee will help. She’s had training in this.” I knew others would think she was giving her own people work as much as possible.

“How big is the fracture?” I asked.

“Good question. I don’t know.”

“How is Ormeda taking it?”

“She’s very upset.”

“Who found the fracture?”

“They called in a more competent person to read the x-rays. Dr. Proctor will be here Wednesday. They won’t put her in a cast but may put a brace on her knee.”

Jack got on the phone. “You were doing well until I left and then you do this. You know I’d come take care of you but if anything happened Betty would sue me.”

Ormeda hung up the phone.

Jack, at last, had the names and addresses of Junior’s four girls. He mailed the lawyer \$1,557.- and at last the girls would receive their share of the right-of-way money, using the formula Mr. Rexroad had given him.

Ormeda in a bed, after two years on the sofa? Great, I thought. Wrong! Ormeda had a different idea. The bed was too high and it was hot up there. She wanted back on the sofa. When they took the bed down, she said, “Now, doesn’t it look better in here?” They returned the bed.

William Kennedy Smith was acquitted of rape in the West Palm Beach trial, the most televised rape trial case in history. I blamed the state prosecutor for her poor presentation. I took it personal as if it were a defeat for myself as well as all women. I could not understand my anger. I tried to see it differently when my sons said Willie was innocent and had been framed. The Kennedy family expressed gratitude and thanks.

Jack called his mother. She did not hang up. Jack had only concern for her. His mother had told Betty "to get off his back", as Jack had requested and she had promised to do. Jack considered this a victory . Betty put everything back on Jack when she said, "Now, I'll have to fight his lawyer."

Jack and I went with my two sisters and their husbands on a three-day trip to Wheeling, West Virginia to see the Festival of Lights. That night, after a card game, I said, "Don't expect me ever to play cards again. I'll never play in 1992." The men had won, every game, the scores ridiculous. Christmas 1991 was rapidly approaching.

The Soviet Union was no more. A Commonwealth for the republics had been organized. On Christmas Day Michel Gorbachev, seventeen weeks after the coup, and seven years as president, officially quit as president of the USSR . The power was in the hands of Boris Yeltsin, president of Russia. "If you have to go, you have to go," Gorbachev said.

President Bush called it the "greatest drama of the twentieth century" and announced support for anyone for democracy.

What a year 1991 had been! The Persian Gulf War, the fall of Communism in Europe, the end of the Soviet Union, and the resignation of Gorbachev. The problems in Jack's family flourished, after two years ago the day after Christmas.

Jack, Ray and I ate Christmas dinner with Gene's family. Betty was with Ormeda.

The arrival of the New Year 1992 was celebrated quietly, Jack and I alone watching TV. At the stroke of twelve, we made phone calls to wish others, "Happy New Year!" Ray DJ'd and spent the night at a motel.

The celebration of the birth of Jesus was over. A New Year with new dreams and hope was ahead.

## Chapter 46

# Beginning a New Year

Jack called his mother as soon as he knew Paul and Betty had left for Colorado. He told her he hoped she enjoyed their visit.

Storing Christmas decorations and cleaning put us all to work. Jack vacuumed and washed windows, which I appreciated.

Justine and Junior left for Florida, as they did each year after Christmas. I knew we would not be going. Jack refused to be indoors with Mac, or any other animal. He was reared on a farm and clung to the idea the place for an animal was outside, not in a house. I saw his side. I also saw my sister's side. Mac was like a child to her, a continual companion. I was in the middle, between my husband and sister on the issue, so I did not get involved. I knew Justine and Junior were hurt and could not understand. I knew Jack would not change his mind.

In Max's letter after New Year's, he made it clear he spoke only for himself and his wife. The enclosures in the letter were copies of letters to oil companies and one to Rebecca. For his share of the undeveloped part of the oil lease he was asking seventy-five thousand. From Rebecca, he requested a lease for the "schoolhouse" by January sixteenth or the gas would be turned off and the sheriff would ask her to move. I did not agree this was wise, but did agree there should be liability insurance on the "schoolhouse", and a charge of seven fifty a night after twenty-four hours would keep out undesirables and live-ins. Whose place it was to enforce this lease, I wasn't sure. Of course, no one had asked me.

The lawyer confirmed the checks had been mailed to Junior's heirs "for oil and gas right of way and site damages paid for the benefit of the Marks estate", requested by Jack and Max.

January 16th, 1992 was remembered as the beginning of Desert Storm one year ago. President Bush's popularity was at an all high then, but was losing ground because of the economic recession. He was embarrassed because he passed out in Tokyo from flu. His trip abroad was being debated.

Jack and Max were on the phone frequently and for longer periods of time. There was a shift from Betty, Debbie and Rebecca to the oil companies and

reimbursements from them for not living up to the contract. Max was consulting another lawyer.

Jack had “cabin fever”. Even celebrating my sister and her husband’s fiftieth wedding anniversary with them did not help. He worked with Ray and his friend making DJ equipment. He wanted to visit Bob and Monika. Jeremiah was asking us to come for his birthday March 2nd. Could we handle it?

The answer came. There was a fire in the kitchen of Bob’s home. A visit now would be out of the question until repairs were made. Maybe later, just maybe.

## Chapter 47

# Braving It to Seattle

Economic recovery for the United States was the main idea in President Bush's State of the Union address on January 28th and the concerns of Americans everywhere. It was Max's concern as he tried to resolve oil and gas contracts. It was Ormeda's concern when she sent Ray a money order for fifty dollars. Enclosed was a belated Christmas card. Debbie had addressed the envelope and signed the card. This was the "something special" for Ray. He called his grandmother and thanked her.

Jack decided we would go to Seattle to celebrate our grandchildren's birthdays with the family. I felt fear. It came as no surprise, Jack told Bob we would come only if he kept George away. "Bob has enough respect for you to do that. We owe it to our grandchildren to get this behind us. We got over what happened at your mother's and we can conquer this."

After Monika said, "Yes, come" a burden was lifted. I washed down the driveway and Jack cleaned the garage.

Jack ordered the airline tickets from Northwest Airlines. We would leave February 19th and return March 7th. I needed a new coat and perm. I ordered extra thyroid pills.

Winter was half over, forty-four days to go. I shoveled snow and knocked it off the bushes with a broom. Gene and Eula were in Florida visiting Max and Melba. The men caught one twenty pound dolphin and called Jack to let him know about it.

I called Ormeda. The doctor had been there and she was doing well. She must continue exercising with the walker. She said, "There's something I want. It's a picture of me in a chair when I was a baby."

"Ormeda, I don't have that picture. Jack took some pictures off the piano but they were of Bob and Ray. We have one of Vi and you as babies. You know I'd send it to you if I had it."

"Send it by Ray." She had not understood.

Jack and I checked my photo albums, which I had organized after my retirement. Jack called her and assured her we did not have that picture, ask Debbie.

Jack called Max's son to make arrangements to have a drain in the backyard opened before we left for Seattle. He told Jack he would not take the Boy Scout Troop to the farm this year. They were going to Pennsylvania. He thought it was better to skip a year and it would be more interesting for the troops. This was true, but it was also a solution to the split created the past summer when they built a pavilion instead of a porch. Smart boy!

Rape was again in the news. I had just accepted the acquittal of William Kennedy Smith, and my emotions settled back to normal. Max Tyson, heavy weight boxer of the world, was charged with raping Desiree Washington, an eighteen-year old Miss Black America contestant from Rhode Island. Tyson was convicted, out on thirty thousand dollar bail. The verdict would be given late in March, after our return from Seattle.

Jack called his mother for Valentine's Day. She asked about the baby picture. Jack again told her we did not have it. Dreama then told Jack Ormeda was not talking and exercising. She thought it had something to do with Max.

Debbie moved out of the "schoolhouse", Rebecca and her daughters moved in. This meant Rebecca would drive twenty miles each day to her job over roads that were not very well maintained. One daughter stayed at day care, and one stayed with her mother, Susan. Her divorce would be final in April. This would not be easy.

Ray, in the rain, said good-bye to his Father and Mother at Cleveland-Hopkins Airport. Jack and I boarded Northwest Airlines. After a three and half hour delay in Detroit, we arrived late at night in Seattle. Monika and Jeremiah waited up for us. Josh and Marilee were asleep on chairs in the den. Bob said, "You've got to hear the water." He opened the door so we could hear the stream behind his house. We woke Josh and Marilee. "Grand dad and Grandma's here." Everyone was happy. We went to bed, exhausted.

I sat in the swing, alone, on the deck. I saw the landscape, now finished, that was started when I was here before. I looked in the distance at the tips of the pine trees peeking out of the fog against the skyline. I walked up and down the deck enjoying Hawaiian-like scenery, created by nature. I saw the house, newly painted, white with brick-red trim. I tried to visualize Bob on the deck, enjoying the beauty as I was. Monika said it was his favorite place. I was glad Bob had found some happiness.

George and the massage were never mentioned. The excitement of togetherness, hockey games, and four birthdays was so exhilarating it blocked out those awful hours, days, weeks and months of turmoil and hell after Jack walked in and I said, "It's a bad time for you to be here. We wish you'd leave." For now, it was as if this time did not exist. We were happy. The decision to make the trip was right.

The men and boys dressed in their suits. Monika, Marilee and I wore dresses. To climax the birthday celebrations, we were going to dinner at the Space Needle. Marilee wore a black and gold taffeta dress and a 14-karat Barbie bracelet I'd given her. A stranger asked permission to take her picture. She was beautiful. After dinner, we ate the biggest desserts ever.

I was sick. I disinfected. I stayed away from others. I was still sick when I

boarded the plane at Seattle-Tac Airport. Bob quickly said good-bye and ran to catch a plane for San Diego. Monika and the grandchildren left in the van. I knew I should get home.

Jet lag did not help my illness. My ears crackled and screeched and each swallow brought a popping sound. My head was numb. My nose was congested and my chest ached. At home, I went to bed and Jack was housekeeper and nurse. He made phone calls. I knew recuperating would be slow.

## Chapter 48

# Almost

A phone call saying I'd won a car, a cellular phone or a TV aroused the greed in me. I was feeling better. I needed a change. Jack agreed to go with me on Friday to a drawing and a meeting. We agreed we could and would resist any sales pressure.

The building contained many meeting rooms, all simply furnished. Seven couples waited as we entered. A hostess greeted us, and would call us when it was our turn.

We followed the hostess to a small conference room. We were soon alone with Mr. Wilcox. He explained the contract, emphasizing we were saving lots of money because we were Senior Citizens. Jack thought I wanted it. I thought Jack wanted it. We signed a five thousand dollar contract for fifty vacations which could be used by friends and family, as well as ourselves. They could be transferred to the next generation, which appealed to us.

In the car, we knew we'd made the wrong decision. We were sick. This was not the kind of vacations Jack and I wanted. They were for the rich that spent time away from their families. Jack and I liked short trips and trips to the cabin. This is not what we needed or wanted.

Jack walked the floor. The offices would not be opened until Tuesday. The Better Business Bureau said they had an excellent reputation. They told Jack the contract could only be broken in a three day period if it had been signed in the home. Jack rejected, then accepted in his mind what we had done. He called Bob. No one home. He was desperate.

Jack was getting the flu. He had to get to the doctor

"I would like for you to be at the conference," Dr. Packard said to me, after examining Jack.

I had never heard Dr. Packard so serious. "For five years you've been bull-headed. I'm surprised there isn't more damage to your heart than there is, damage that could've been slowed down with medication. Your attitude has been wrong. You've got to lose weight, a pound a week."

Jack, ever so humble, looked Dr. Packard in the eye. "I promise I'll try."

"It's my job as a doctor to tell you these things. You could have died with a

heart attack. I'm prescribing this medicine which I want you to take two times a day. I want to see you in a month."

Jack and I ate at a Chinese restaurant. He took the cold medicine the doctor prescribed. Suddenly, Jack was depressed and chilling and went to bed. I told Ray his dad was not well.

"If only I could get Bob. I can't get the guy that sold us that vacation plan out of my mind. I think of Betty and Mom and how our family is torn apart and strangers in there taking care of Mom. I can't stop my mind from thinking. Hold my hand."

I held his hand and wiped the tears as they streamed down his cheeks, and then wiped the tears from my eyes.

"Howard Stanley tells us we are to cry together," I said and put a pillow under his head. "I don't think you should lie here and think."

"I'm cold."

I put his housecoat over his feet, and got the heating pad. He squeezed my hand. "I love you so much."

Ray came down from upstairs and turned on the TV. He and his dad watched a western story together. His mind was off Mr. Wilcox.

Tuesday, as soon as the offices opened, Jack got an appointment. We were at the office five o'clock sharp. Mr. Wilcox, a tall black man with gentle ways, entered.

Jack stood. "Is there any way we can cancel the contract we signed? We signed the contract in good faith. You were in good faith, and so were we."

"You will have to contact the main office."

"I've already done that. I talked to Mr. Quimby. He said you were the one that would have to make the decision."

I sat scared stiff. I was afraid Jack might say or do something wrong, or that he wouldn't hear what was said. I prayed for Jack. I knew his anxiety and grief.

After what seemed like an eternity, Mr. Wilcox returned to the room. Softly he said, "I can cancel the contract."

Jack went to the car and returned with the papers, including the contract and order form for the cellular phone. Mr. Wilcox wrote a letter assuring a deposit of over six hundred dollars would be returned and the contract declared void.

Jack and Mr. Wilcox shook hands. "You have renewed my faith in mankind," Jack said, and offered him a fifty dollar bill, which he refused to take. This increased his faith even more.

It went so smoothly. The plan would be beautiful for someone who lived that kind of lifestyle, but for Jack and I it was too rich and elaborate. I said, "Let's go to K-Mart. We've got lots of money."

## Chapter 49

# Mac Wins

Mac was Justine's black poodle that traveled around the United States with us and won the love of our grandchildren. Justine nourished the poodle from the day she bought it as a baby, but never successfully got it to eat. The poodle remained thin and malnourished. Nothing helped.

Mac was faithful to Justine, on all occasions. If Mac were left alone in the RV, he waited in the window, regardless of time. As soon as he saw the car, or her, he began whining and ran to the door. He'd jump from the ground to her arms, squirm and wiggle, and lick her on the face. No one could substitute in her place, even Junior, no matter how much they tried. Mac knew, and let everyone know he knew, he was waiting for her..

It wasn't Mac Jack rejected, but an animal being treated as a human and living indoors. He hated it when Justine talked "baby talk" to the dog. He rejected Mac, and protected no one from his cruel and embarrassing re.

No wonder I had doubts when Jack and I on a snowy Sunday morning started to Florida to visit Justine, Junior and Mac. I did not know what to expect, but knew Justine would do all she could to pacify Jack.

We spent a night at the Cotton Planters Inn in North Carolina and arrived Monday evening at the Ara Resort near Silver Springs, Florida. Junior was stretched out on a recliner reading. Mac's bark got Junior's attention and a big smile of welcome crossed his face. I said, "Here, Mac." Justine stopped painting and came to the door. Jack had driven fast to beat the snow storm that was coming in and we were a day early.

We hugged. I watched Jack's reaction to Mac. He ignored the dog. He had decided to be kind to the dog, but it would get no special attention.

Junior moved the RV from Ara Campgrounds to Clerbrook Resorts. While Junior and Jack played golf, Justine and I attended craft shows, played bingo, shopped and went to flea markets. Each night the four of us played cards, Mac sat on Justine's lap and laid his head on the table, as if he were a spectator. The threat to not play cards this year was forgotten. I had to try.

Jack and Junior had an appointment with Max to go fishing. Justine and I stayed at the RV.

Justine took Mac for a walk. I began shampooing my hair. Jack and Junior returned early from the trip. I quickly twisted a towel around my head.

"I did two bad things," Jack said.

"Yes, each day he caught the biggest fish." I knew Junior was trying to help Jack out. "We were fishing in water that was two hundred fifty feet deep on a three hundred fifty thousand dollar boat. It cost four hundred fifty dollars to fish and the bait was fifty dollars. Jack beat us all."

Jack brought in a plastic bag of fish to refrigerate. "I caught a thirty to forty pound Amber- Jack.." Jack's face was red and sunburned.

"I called Mom while I was at Max's. She's in the hospital at Westlake. She's mad at Betty for having the bathroom fixed. She couldn't get to the bathroom so she wouldn't take the water pill and the fluid built up in her body. She told Betty she should have left the bathroom like it was for two years, and that would be long enough for her. Gene went down. Gene was the one that called Max. I told her we'd stop on our way home. She's coming home today."

Each minute with Justine and Junior was busy and exciting. We boarded a shuttle with eight others to go to Seminole Indian Bingo. It would cost each of us fifty to a hundred dollars. Not one of us won a cent of the big money being offered. We did not accept defeat easily. We'd try for the smaller prizes at the campground.

BINGO! It was Jack. Forty dollars.

BINGO! It was Justine. Twenty-four dollars.

BINGO! It was Junior. Forty dollars.

I did not bingo.

The next day we played bingo.

BINGO! It was Junior. Thirty -five dollars.

BINGO! Last game, cover all, jackpot for Jack, seventy-three dollars.

Never had we had so many wins.

Our last card game together, Justine and I wiped the men out with a two-game victory.

Early Monday morning Jack and I said good-bye to Justine and Junior. Justine held Mac and I patted him on the head. "Good-bye Mac."

Jack had squelched his feelings about Mac until I could visit my sister again.

"Good-bye, Mac," he said.

## Chapter 50

Just Good-bye

Jack and I thought it would be wiser if we visited Ormeda during the day, so we got a motel in Westlake. To kill time, we went shopping at a store where Kathy worked. We would meet after work and talk over drinks.

“Debbie got a lawyer to write Max about the letters he’d written Rebecca and her about living in the “schoolhouse”.”

It all became plain. Max had not told us this. Was this the reason he dropped the issues? All he said was that he didn’t have time

The next morning, we left the motel early and started the trip to Ormeda’s on the winding, country roads. We stopped for a quick visit with Aunt Vi and Lorna. I wanted to give Lorna a book, *The Unseen Essentials*, I was given in Florida. It was Lorna that called about Ormeda, first us, and we weren’t at home, then Gene who called Max. I expressed gratitude, and she reminded me I had requested she keep us informed. I wondered why no one had contacted the family. Where did the boys stand, not with Ormeda, but with the others in the family and the hired people who worked there Surely they knew we’d be there as soon as we could. Were we wanted? The boys and Betty should be first in what was happening.

Lorna said Debbie was no longer manager at the day-care where she worked. They weren’t making any money so they went out of business. She was working at a day-care, but a different position.

Lorna thought someone, meaning Betty, owed Jack an apology. He was right. There seemed to be enough money now at Ormeda’s. The church was growing and summer plans were being made. Our visit was short, since Jack wanted to see his mother.

Jack and I arrived at the farm at ten o’clock on Wednesday, April Fools Day. The old feeling of desire to be there was gone. The new steel door on the front of the house brightened the dull look of the artificial red brick covering of the huge house. The old bath tub that had been removed was on the back porch. We entered quietly and Helen met us.

“We think it best you tell Ormeda we’re here,” I suggested.

“Oh, she’s expecting you.” Her eyes sparkled and her laugh showed warmth.

We followed Helen into the living room to where Ormeda was on the sofa.

“Who is it, Jack?” and there was no doubt the love she had for him. Jack told her about our trip to Seattle and Florida. Then he disappeared to the car to get the video of the fishing trip with Max. She moved near the TV to see and hear. She could hear Max laughing as the men pulled in the big fish.

Helen was not well. She had been in intensive care for three days before Ormeda was taken to the hospital. She had lost weight, looked tired, and had black circles under her eyes. The doctor put her on Zantac for heartburn or ulcers and let her come home.

Ormeda was on oxygen at night. She named her walker Charlie, and used it two times to go to the bathroom while we were there. “Come on, Charlie.” The bathroom was more convenient and spacious. In place of the tub there was a manufactured shower stall, and the sink had been moved to the corner to allow more room for the walker. The bathroom had not been painted.

Helen baked corn bread and fixed Ormeda’s lunch. Jack and I ate a piece of the bread.

No tears, just good-bye.

It had taken a long time and a lot of suffering. Ray would be waiting.

Dreama called on April 19, 1992 to wish us “Happy Easter”. She had caused emergency against Ormeda’s will. At the hospital, Ormeda was uncomfortable and embarrassed because she was dirty. In the lounge, Debbie blamed her for this and she told her she “was pushing things too far” and she wasn’t coming back. It was Debbie’s responsibility to bathe Ormeda, since she was opinionated that Debbie was the only one that could do this. Dreama’s concern was that Ormeda would not let anyone bathe her, shampoo her hair, even Debbie.

“Does she wash her face?” I thought this always made you feel better.

“No”.

“Does she wash her hands?”

“No. Betty was in Christmas and bathed her and did her hair. She didn’t speak to Betty or Paul the next day. Betty offered her a washcloth to wipe her hands and she threw it at Betty. Betty asked her, ‘Why are you so mean?’ and she answered, ‘I don’t know.’ None of us know what to do. She digs at herself all the time.”

“No, you can’t force her. I’d have a talk with her and explain you are considering having a nurse come in to bathe her. Hopefully, she’d rather you bathed her than a nurse. Is she concerned about money?”

“She thinks money. When she had oxygen, she asked about money.”

“Then I’d know what the nurses charge and tell her. Dr. Proctor could help you.”

“I think you can get a nurse free, under Medicaid.”

“I do too. Take care of yourself. I didn’t think Helen looked too well.”

“She doesn’t. Happy Easter. Goodbye.”

Jack and I went to Indiana to see our son, Bob, presented an alumni award at his Alma mater, Rose Hulman Institute of Technology. Bob identified very professionally with his peer group, the luncheon and dinner were elegantly served, Justine and Junior had come for the occasion, and Bob was honored with the

highest in the field of neural networks. Yet when I got home, I was depressed. I blamed it on decaffeinated coffee and went to bed to sleep the depression away.

I thought instead of the boys giving me something for Mother's Day it would be fun if I gave them something. I chose two of my best 8 x 10 pictures taken while I was teaching and had them framed. I marked, "Do Not Open Until Mother's Day" on the package. I smiled as I tried to make the decision as to which boy would get which picture. Bob took the picture home with him when he left.

Jack made phone calls to his mother and Aunt Vi for Mother's Day but also wished Aunt Vi happy birthday, her ninety-first.

"Betty might have to have hip surgery. Jill, Paul's daughter, ran up a big bill, so they brought her home from Texas and gave her a job at Betty's business.."

Ormeda was upset because Basil paid over three hundred dollars of his own money on what he had spent for her. I didn't know whether it was Betty or Ormeda that was having financial problems.

My Mother's Day began with a call from Monika. Bob sleepily said, "Happy Mother's Day" and went back to sleep. He had not opened the package.

Ray came home from work and went to bed. I did not have the chance to give him his package.

Should I give Ray his package late at night or wait until the next morning? I took the box wrapped in gold shiny paper with gold ribbon, and went upstairs. Ray was lying on his stomach reading.

"I have something for you." He looked at the label, "Happy Mother's Day, To: Ray, From: Mom". His eyes opened wide.

"Gee, I'm supposed to get something for you," and he rose from the bed. He broke loose the paper and took the picture out of the box and laughed.

"Ray, I give myself to you, all of me." We hugged. "I gave one to Bob, too. I had a hard time deciding which one to give to each of you. I gave him the one when I was younger, because that's when he was at home. You've been with me when I am older."

"You're not old. I remember that picture. He'll probably want mine and I'll want his," and we hugged again.

"Where are you going to put it?"

"Can't put it on the water bed. It'd fall off. We'll put it here," and he placed it on the chest of drawers. "We'll go out to eat next week."

Bob had opened the package when I called. He was deciding where to put it. The next day I got Bob and Monika's mother day card in the mail.

On Wednesday, Ray and I went to Chi Chi's. He stopped at the Green Machine money station and withdrew money. He opened the doors for me. It was a special time.

We waited for the Glenville Democrat to read the article we had sent in about Bob's award. I knew Bob would be pleased with the article, but not with the picture. Anything that suggested Bob was fat, he hated. I wished we had not sent in that picture. I did not want Bob to see it, because I knew he would not like it. I knew what people would say, because they had said it before. Even Grandma Ormeda made a big issue of anyone with a little weight

on them. She told Jack one time, "I'd rather you die from smoking than from being too heavy." I looked at the picture of him again. He had a lovable, yet determined expression on his face. I was concerned about his feelings, not what others would say. I'd wait for his reaction.

This Memorial Day, I chose to celebrate on Misty 30th, not the business day a week later. I was sixty-six and felt comfortable with the traditional one.

Jack and I went with Justine and Junior to the cemeteries, to a granddaughter's dance recital, and we celebrated together Justine's sixty-fifth birthday. Then they visited us and the letters for NITRO PUBLIC LIBRARY were cut out and varnished in Jack's workshop. They would be placed on the end of the library where their daughter worked. The next project was a round cover for a spare tire for Ray's Jimmy to advertise his DJ business. It was like a record, with a man running, and the words, "Have Records, Will Travel".

With the letters wrapped and stored in the trunk of the car, they left after celebrating Jack's sixty-fifth birthday, and his eligibility for Medicare.

One neighbor on the right had a baby and the one on the left was diagnosed with cancer of the pancreas. What a contrast!

Ray and his friend, Jeff, left for a week vacation in Canada.

Two days after Monika had stomach surgery she called, "It is a lot worse than I expected."

"Jack, I'd better go and help them."

I planned to stay in Seattle eleven days and return on July 2nd, our forty-third wedding anniversary. I remembered our anniversary last year at the cabin and compared it to being on a jet, one so primitive, one modern. All the clothes were clean and ironed, Ray's lunch was ready for him when he returned from Canada, the beds were clean and food in the freezer.

My round-trip, non-stop airplane fare WACs \$720-, Flight 801 Continental which would leave at 8:41 from Cleveland Hopkins Airport.

"Take care of our babies," Jack said, meaning our grandchildren.

"Take care of our baby," I replied, meaning Ray. We both laughed. We gave a quick kiss.

I boarded the plane and took a window seat 2A, my first time flying First Class. The receptionist took my red coat and instead of rolling it up and putting it above the seat, carefully hung it in a closet.

The pilot announced, "Flight time, four hours, forty-seven minutes."

I chose Sprite to drink, realizing most passengers would choose an alcoholic appetizer. I wiped my hands with the wet towel and looked for the tray to pull down from the back of the seat in front of me. There was none. I decided to watch. I saw the receptionist appear with a small, white linen tablecloth and cover the tray of the person in front of me, but I did not see where she got the tray. I decided to watch the man beside me. He took the tray from under a cover on the arm rest. I tried to get my tray out, but couldn't. The stranger beside me reluctantly helped.

The receptionist covered my tray with a white, linen tablecloth and gave me a large dinner napkin. She carried in a tray with a small slice of fish, two slices of cucumber and two slithers of green pepper. There was a roll, sauce,

and my own salt and pepper shakers. I thought, "Why all the trouble for such a small amount of food?" I got my answer when she asked me for the d'oeuvres plate. The meal was being served in courses. Salad followed, stuffed chicken in strawberry sauce, rice, broccoli with cream cheese and chocolate cake for desert. I chose decaffeinated coffee to drink. I now understood why the ticket agent was so elated when he told me I would travel First Class at coach rate. There was a difference, a big difference in service.

The man in the seat beside me read, and I read. We never spoke to each other after he helped with the tray. After dinner, he turned his back toward me and took a nap.

The grandchildren held on to their dad's legs when they met me at the airport. I had never seen them shy before.

"Let me see you. Let me see how much you have grown. How nice you look."

Monika had lots of help from Bob, the children, and neighbors, but I soon knew I was needed. I worked to please Monika and the children. Monika's bed was moved from the upstairs to the basement because of the extreme heat. Slowly, bent over from surgery, she was recovering enough to go to the bathroom and upstairs. Bob, when not taking care of Monika, worked at night in his office. I cooked, washed dishes and clothes, and cleaned the house.

Bob proudly took me into his home office and on the wall with certificates, awards and memos was my picture I had given him for Mother's Day. I knew my sacrifices and efforts, in part, were responsible for his success and my picture belonged there.

I read the book, "These Happy Golden Years by Laura Ingalls Wilder. I resolved to be like Laura in the book, and do less talking. When Pa played his fiddle at night, he sang a song that my mother sang.

"Just a song at twilight, when the lights are low,  
"And the flickering shadows come and go,  
"Though the heart be weary, sad the day and long  
"Still to us at twilight, comes love's old song.  
"Comes love's old sweet song."

Laura got married, and the book ended: "Golden years are passing by, these happy, golden years." How well I knew.

Jack called every day. He made me something from black walnut in the wood shop for our anniversary. The only clues were the walnut was from the farm and it had moveable parts.

Bob rescheduled my flight when I was confused about what twelve A. M. meant, after midnight not at noon as I thought. There was no charge.

As the children left for gymnastics camp, each passed me at the door and gave me a good-bye kiss and hug. Monika cried when I said good-bye to her and I said, "Be brave."

"I love you, Lenore."

"You are precious," and I left with Bob for the airport.

The plane would be a half hour late. Bob had to go. I took hold of his arm and walked with him to the X-ray machine. My gaze followed him as he walked away. His broad shoulders were stooped, much too young, his large shoes with

thick soles were run over, and the blue pants too long almost reaching the floor. I loved him and wanted to keep this picture of him forever in my mind. For no reason, he turned, and there we were, looking at each other for the last time. I said "Goodbye" loud enough for him to hear. "Good-bye," and we knew it had to be.

Bob would go to the university and teach a class that would be televised. I would go First Class back to Cleveland.

The wheels of the plane were leaving the ground for take-off. I thought of each I'd come to help.

"Goodbye, Bob," my first born, now forty two years old, a fine man struggling to achieve in a competitive world, and still maintain his relationship with God.

"Goodbye, Monika," my petite, beautiful blonde daughter-in-law, so demanding and yet so giving, a good Christian whom I admired more each time we met.

"Goodbye, Jeremiah," my oldest grandson, ten years of age, so competitive, sensitive, and loving.

"Goodbye, Josh," blonde, thin, eight years old, always to equal or excel Jeremiah.

"Goodbye, Marilee," the granddaughter I thought we'd never have, a five year old, curly haired, confident, lovable.

The flight attendant noticed the tears in my eyes. "None of that now."

This time I knew what to expect First Class, except the trays did fold down from the back of the seat. Not many were flying First Class. Again the white tablecloth and napkins. I must not think of Bob and his family. I diverted my thoughts to Jack and Ray.

The one hour lay over from 3:30 to 4:30 in Denver was timed just right for me to use the bathroom. Flight time: 2 hours, 17 minutes.

"Happy Anniversary," I said to Jack. I noticed the humidity and stuffiness of the air.

Jack led the way into the living room. There, in a nine inch walnut frame was a picture of my grandmother with flowers made of her own hair. Ray would be twenty-eight June 6th.

## Chapter 51

# Thank You

Each spring Jack looked forward to fishing for walleye in Lake Erie. He began early cleaning the Larson eighteen foot boat he had bought from my sister and her husband. After many attempts to get friends to go with him, he became discouraged. With a surprise decision, he decided to sell the boat.

“Jack, I don’t want to be the reason you sell the boat, but I don’t want a hitch on the Town Car either. Buy a truck and put a hitch on it.”

“Its ninety percent other reasons and ten percent because of you. You have never liked the boat. I don’t want to use the Jimmy and have it burglarized again. To ride in the Jimmy hurts my back anyway. I can’t afford a truck and the insurance. The boat has been nothing but disappointments.”

I remembered how proud we were when we bought it. I knew it was Jack’s dream to take his grandsons fishing. I felt loyalty to my sister and her husband. It helped when Ray said, “I have no interest in the boat.”

Jack sold the boat for fifteen hundred dollars to his brother Gene. When he pulled it out of the driveway with his red truck, I felt it was the right thing to do. I saw a tear in Jack’s eye. The dream was gone.

Every Saturday Jack called his mother. The calls were short and impersonal. He knew Ormeda had twenty four hour care, took oxygen when needed, and Debbie’s visits were shorter and spaced farther apart. Rebecca lived in the “schoolhouse” and stayed to herself, rarely visiting. Betty was seldom mentioned and the weather remained the universal and most important subject. Lorna was becoming more and more a special person to Jack and I. Her letters were lengthy, newsy, and updated us on the church, her mother, Ormeda and gave us her interpretation as she perceived things. A letter from her was special and welcomed. “Guess you’ve heard Basil quit the scene as he and Dreama come to a ‘parting of the ways’. I can’t fault Basil as I feel Dreama was a bit ‘bossy’ and unrelenting.”

We had not heard.

The one hundred dollars Rebecca repaid Ormeda was used to paper the dining room. She would repay the other two hundred and they would paper the living room. As always, Lorna praised Jack.

Saturday when I awoke, I heard Jack on the phone passing the news about Basil quitting on to his brothers. Then he called his mother. The doctor was coming because her leg was worse and when she was constipated, the laxative caused her to have diarrhea.

The sun shone through the white verticals and I walked in and sat at the dining room table with Jack.

“Jack, you and I see things so differently. Has anyone in the family called to thank Basil for what he has done? He stood by you every step of the way when you and Max had your upset. He came down and helped you load the four-wheeler. He stood by the van and said, ‘I love you’. When Debbie tried to turn your mother against you, he said, ‘Don’t let Debbie run you out. This is your home.’ He rescued the situation when your mother needed help. He’s been through a lot to quit.” Tears were in my eyes, as I thought of all that had happened.

“He’s a liar. He said he’d never quit.”

“You didn’t think you’d quit, and look what happened.” I knew this was a sensitive subject.

“I’ve heard you talk for ten minutes,” Jack said. “Another five and that’s all I can take.”

I took the risk and took another five.

“I think you owe Basil an apology. I think it’s awful how you’ve talked about him to Max and Gene. I told Dreama he’s blood-line and that makes a difference.”

“You’re a jewel, Lenore.” Basil wasn’t at home when he called.

When I came home from shopping, Jack handed me the phone. It was Basil.

He talked about his daughter’s weight, cutting down pine trees at the church that morning, and finally about quitting at Ormeda’s.

“Dreama’s a bitch. I swear she poured the coffee down the drain so there wouldn’t be any when I came. I told Ormeda she was boss and ask her to tell Dreama to leave a pot of coffee for me. Ormeda wouldn’t do it, so I quit. I said I’d never quit and I did.”

“I’m sure it was an accumulation of things. That’s the way I am. I take and take and then I explode.”

“Dreama wanted to be boss and run everything.” Knowing Dreama, I understood.

“You did a good job. Ormeda liked you and could depend on you. Circumstances change. Don’t place a guilt trip on yourself and as they say, ‘Don’t let the turkeys get you down.’”

“I quit something I started and I feel bad about that. I was there, what, about three years? I feel relieved about it in one way and bad in another..”

I understood, oh how I understood.

“Basil, thank you. You came in at a time when Jack and I couldn’t. Thank you very much.”

Jack thanked Basil. I wondered if anyone else did.

## Chapter 52

# A Broken Bond

President Bush versus John Clifton, Governor of Arkansas, for president of the United States in the election in November. The polls gave Clifton the lead. President Bush had sent American troops to Kuwait for a two week training period to show support of Kuwait. Saddam Hussein was in power, a challenge to the United Nations. Two years had passed since the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq.

August third, nineteen ninety two, my sixty seventh birthday. I had no expectations, just the reality that youth had faded into old age. I looked in the mirror at my frizzy gray hair and wrinkles. I moved more slowly and was awkward. Bifocal glasses made me clumsy. My broken wrist and its pain was a reminder of my return home from France and the fall in my own backyard. My mother had not lived to be this age. I counted my blessings.

Live for Today, Dream for Tomorrow, Learn from Yesterday. How well I remembered my last birthday. From yesterday, I learned to accept what happens, to expect nothing, and you can't be disappointed. I began the day expecting nothing.

I smiled when I opened the package from Bob with a hand-made caricature of himself. in it. That was my Bob, always creative, with a touch of humor. My next door neighbor whose husband was dying of cancer, visited and brought me a box of candy. Alesia called. Ray gave me a dozen of red roses.

Live for Today. I thought of my baby Ray old enough to order, pay for, and have delivered roses to me.

I posed for a picture in a sombrero when we ate at Chi Chi's. I got phone calls from Justine who had just returned from a trip out West with her grandchildren, and Monika, recovering on schedule from surgery. Molly and I went out for ice cream. I expected nothing.

It had been three months since I talked to my oldest sister, Iris. A birthday card from her arrived late. I wanted to thank her for the card and to know they were well. I was afraid. Our last talk together ended in advice from her, and I wanted to share. I told her, "I can't please everyone." I wanted to share Bob receiving an alumni award, and an article I had written. She told me how

it should have been written, but it was too late. I'd already mailed it to the paper. I just wanted to share!

Howard, her husband, talked briefly and handed it to Iris. I talked to her about our trip to Florida to visit Justine .

"Thank you, Iris for the birthday card. It showed you forgave me for the nasty way I talked to you the last time".

"I don't understand you. We don't act that way. You don't like me. You don't love me. Our lives are better this way, " meaning we stay apart and not communicate.

I grasped for words. "I do love you." I wasn't sure she heard me. I talked about my trip to Seattle, selling the boat, and a leaky basement. She talked about the death of her sister-in-law, and fishing at Port Clifton.

After being a sister for sixty seven years, sharing girlhood, schooling, teaching and family, and she thinks I don't love her. I love her enough to stay away, because that is what she wants. It won't be easy, but I can dream for tomorrow.

I expected nothing for my birthday. What my sister wanted was a gift from me, love.

## Chapter 53

# A Hitch

Jack returned from the cabin. "If it weren't for bad luck, we had no luck at all." It rained, the machines broke down. Ormeda's living room ceiling had fallen down, and he helped put it back. He attended the church reunion, to talk, not eat. He did not take sides in the fuss between Basil and Dreama.

The Democrat Convention in New York and the Republican Convention in Houston were over and it was seventy-five days until election day. President Bush gained points in the polls after the Republican Convention. Barbara Bush and Melba Quayle had given excellent speeches. Issues were the economy, family values, foreign police, crime, abortion, personal military records and womanizing. The fight was on.

Max called. They were preparing for Hurricane Andrew that would hit at 5 A. M. on August 24th. Hit it did at 4:30. Many evacuated. They didn't. They got in food, water, and taped their windows. They were safe. Twelve were killed. Wind speed had been 160 miles an hour. It had been declared the biggest natural disaster in history. I was glad Bob made the choice not to take the job at the university in Miami.

"Circumstances alter decisions," I said, as I gave in to Jack putting a hitch on the Town Car. I'd suffer three-hundred-sixty days so he could use it five.

"Come here, Lenore," and Jack's blue eyes beamed with satisfaction. "See how the hitch is concealed under the car, barely visible. The man at the shop told me even if the car tears up in four years, my wife would blame the hitch." My feeling about the hitch did not change, but I would try to make the most of it.

To get my mind off the hitch on the car, I decided I'd sent Bob twenty-five presents, one for each day until his birthday on August 25th. He'd be forty-two and I thought this would be different. I knew I would be unable to buy clothes for him, since most of his were custom made. I'd begin with small things, and the last day, his birthday, would be the climax with something big. This was harder than I anticipated and time consuming. I succeeded, and on the last day he opened a check for five hundred dollars. His in-laws were visiting and thought this was a great idea.

This was Jack's first trip using the hitch on the Town Car. I was furious as I saw the car pulling the trailer carrying the four-wheeler leave the driveway.

Jack called. Paul Marks hurt his back and could not go. The backhoe was stuck in the mud. The refrigerator was broken and the meat spoiled. He was alone and discouraged. The only encouragement was a bulldozer operator from the oil company who was working on the road and giving directions.

When Jack did not come home on time, I was first angry, then scared. When he called, he said, "I don't want to make any more decisions. You were right. The Town Car can not pull the four-wheeler. It got hot." It hadn't been four years, but one trip. A bearing on the trailer had gone bad. He would stay at a motel and come home the next day. More trouble, more money.

I called Paul Marks for Jack. He said Paul had relinquished all rights to the farm, even Power of Attorney, but "to let the boys stew over it for a while". Betty knew the boys loved her, they were just angry with her. Her job was to take care of her mother.

I could not help but think it was also the job of her brothers to take care of their mother.

## Chapter 54

# Ormeda's Eighty-nine

Ormeda was taking oxygen more often. Her leg was swollen. Dreama and Helen were in complete charge, seven days a week, twenty four hours a day. Jack was never asked to return. Tears were in his eyes more often. Words were few.

When Jack heard that Ormeda wondered why her children never visited, and when they did visit did not stay long, Jack took that as an invitation. Jack and I would go back, and stay for four days at Ormeda's.

We left Ray off at the airport to go to visit Bob in Seattle for a week. We headed south. We were ready to forgive and forget.

The first one we saw was Debbie.

"Hello, Ormeda. Hello, Debbie." Our eyes met. She smiled.

"Hello," she answered. I sensed she was as ready to forgive and forget as we. Ormeda nodded approval. I kissed Jennifer and my glasses fell to the floor. I ask Jennifer about school and Debbie talked about her job at the day care. When I told them Jack had received a positive doctor's report "and even his attitude was better", Debbie looked sideways at Ormeda and smiled.

Tessie was not kind when she whispered to me, "We'll wait until they leave to eat." I had brought Kentucky Fried Chicken.

When Rebecca and her two daughters and Elizabeth and her twin sons visited, I noticed none of them ate. I remembered the fuss between Dreama and them. Not eating at their grandma's was noticeable.

Sunday, September 20, 1992, Ormeda was eighty-nine. We knew a celebration had been planned. Jack and I left for church so Helen could get Ormeda ready. Thirty-eight people were at church, much better than the ten several years ago, before Lorna and Cliff returned to the community. The offering was eighty dollars. Eighty-nine cents clinked in the birthday dish for Ormeda, each penny representing a year of her life.

Three o'clock the celebration of Ormeda's birthday began at the farm house. The minister from the small church was there, Basil overcame his feelings toward Dreama and was there, and my sister and her husband from Howardton surprised me when they drove in. Fifteen adults passed around the table and filled their plates.

Jack had a special gift for his mother. Holding a basketball in his hand, he said, "I once asked you what was the happiest time of your life and I thought you'd say the birth of your first child, but you said, 'basketball'." Everyone laughed. Everyone present wrote with a permanent marker a few words on the basketball, then their signature.

My sister taught me to make a man's shirt out of dollar bills. I used five dollar bills and made one and presented it to the minister. It amounted to fifty dollars.

One by one, Ormeda opened other gifts.

The people that came and went at the farm house confided in me, and I tried to be careful how I handled the information. Dreama, Helen and Tessie were not being paid for staying with Ormeda at night, since Basil had quit. Betty had said it would "be a hardship" to pay them. Dreama said she worked eighty-five hours one week, seventy-five the next and was paid for thirty- seven hours. She said this could not go on because she needed time at home.

At the birthday dinner, almost everyone knew Betty had a mild heart attack. Everyone kept the secret from Ormeda, so no one talked about it. Paul Marks told Jack he couldn't "hold" it any longer when he told him. Dreama had told him. Paul Marks and Dreama knew this was to be a secret, but Dreama first told Paul Marks in strict confidence, and Paul Marks just had to tell someone. The news spread. Ormeda, my sister and her husband were the only people that did not know, so I motioned for Justine to come into the bathroom, and I told her.

I cried when I heard about Betty's attack. She had rejected me, rejected Jack and been nasty to him, but I did not want to see her suffer.

Max called and invited her to Florida to recuperate.

Gene called and offered his oil money to help with Ormeda's expenses.

Jack and I did nothing.

I hugged Ormeda. I was going home again. "This is a hug for old time sake. I've been married to Jack for forty-three years."

Jack hugged her and said, "I've known you longer than that."

## Chapter 55

# A Carnation Good-bye

Autumn was beautiful, invigorating, encouraging. I worked six hours for four days in the basement, cleaning paneling, furniture and tile floor. I organized. I threw things away. This was a job long overdue.

I called Lorna to ask her if the church could use a large chalkboard I wanted to throw away. She told me the four day visit brought a new light to Ormeda's eyes. Ormeda kept repeating, "Jack's not mad at me anymore." Betty was too weak to carry a full load at work. She could work only an eight hour day. She could not travel too far from her doctor., so could not come home. Again Lorna told me Jack might be the peacemaker in the family, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall inherit the earth".

"No, Paul Marks will be," Jack said.

Before Jack and I left for a trip to Branson, Missouri with Justine and Junior and Mac, our next door neighbor called and said her husband was in the hospital. This was so sudden it was hard to believe. We'd already scheduled the trip from October ninth to the twenty -first. John Clifton, who was Governor of Arkansas, was in the lead in the polls against President Bush and Ross Perot, an independent candidate that entered the race as a write-in candidate. The trees were their most vibrant colors in the Ozark Mountains and provided a colorful backdrop to the country western and religious music we heard. Geographically Arkansas was like West Virginia, hilly and beautiful.

It was a quick trip, seeing as many country artists as we could schedule. When we were back at Justine's home, I awoke and could not walk. My left knee was swollen, feverish. I held to the furniture, took long steps with my right leg, and put on walking shoes.

When I was back in my own home, I did my best to unload suitcases and put things away. The pain was unbearable. I could not walk. I did not want to cry. I did cry, but I did not want anyone to know. For the first time in my life, I knew defeat, helplessness and could not do what I wanted to do. I held to the vanity. I thought of others who could not walk.

I finally got to the phone and made an appointment with Dr. Parker. I thought the cancer I had fifteen years ago had recurred and settled in my knee.

At the hospital, Jack pushed me in a wheel chair to have x-rays taken, which showed there were no broken bones. The doctor said it was inflammation, and water on the knee. He prescribed rest and medication.

I learned what I could do. I could stand in one place and peel vegetables or watch food that was cooking. I could dress myself. I tried to ignore the tingling in my toes and the throbbing in my knee. I told myself to be patient.

It was no surprise when Helen, our neighbor, called and said Tony had passed away. It was nine thirty on Thursday, October 29th. Jack had been a faithful friend to Tony and taken him for radiation treatments daily for six weeks. Six months and cancer of the pancreas had killed Tony. Jack would not visit him after he became bedfast, saying, "I can't help him any more."

I wanted my knee to heal so I could attend Tony's funeral. Jack did most of the work. After six days, the swelling was leaving. The fever was gone. The medicine took the pain away so I could walk, but I knew it was not completely well.

The day before election, on a weary November day, Jack and I attended our first Catholic funeral for Tony, our sixty-nine year old friend and neighbor. Helen, and their son Gary, brave stood by during his illness and now at his funeral. Their over-protected lives would now be challenged by the responsibilities of living, alone, without Tony. Jack and I had been strong, too, because both of us respected and loved Tony. Each laid a carnation on the casket as a last earthly goodby. Jack and I drove home, each in quiet meditation.

Life, without Tony in his backyard, would be different.

## Chapter 56

# A Game Warden

Election day, November 3, 1992 would decide the next president of the United States. Turn out of voters was the largest in history. Would it be President Bush, Governor Clifton, or Ross Perot? Jack and I were for Bush, Ray was for Perot.

Landslide for Clifton. Electoral count was 349 for Clifton, 132 for Bush and none for Perot. The victorious Democrat party would take office January 20th, 1993.

I struggled with the acceptance of John Clifton as our next president for four years. Outside, the snow had changed everything to a winter wonderland. This was a reminder that fifteen days from now it would be three years since Ormeda fell in the tub. Those three years had been overwhelming and hell.

I decided to call Dreama. Ormeda was taking oxygen, both during the day and night. Her mood swings were more pronounced. She could not wear the elastic stocking on her bad leg because of the bleeding. She worried about money She and Helen assured her they would take other jobs to get money and take care of her free, if they had to. They would not desert her or put her in a nursing home. As for herself, Dreama said it was hard to make snap decisions like she had to sometimes. Betty's lungs were not clear from pneumonia, and she did not know when she would be home. She was going to Cripple Creek to "her other house" for the week end.

As for Thanksgiving, they were working it out. I told her Debbie usually fixed Thanksgiving dinner. Debbie and her sisters brought in dinner for Ormeda Thanksgiving Day.

Without planning, discussion, or much preparation Jack and I left in the rain to go visit his mother. Behind the car was the trailer carrying a large chalkboard to give the church. Jack was cautious as we traveled over the slippery roads.

Jack leaned the chalkboard against the church wall.

The same day, Wednesday, Jack and I carried a hundred dollars worth of groceries into the farm house, and Helen helped us put them away. Ormeda was still on the sofa, legs still bloodshot, purple and swollen and elevated on

the small chair. Charlie, her walker, was nearby, and the red and black checked wool-like blanket Betty had given her was spread over her knees. She was happy to see Jack.

Jack and I would sleep in the upstairs bedroom, and Jack would complain of cigarette smoke to me, and I would threaten him if he complained or mentioned it. We would not interrupt or change any arrangements for the “help”.

Dreama and Jack cooked dinner while I listened to Ormeda tell about Uncle Berm.

“He was an atheist. Just because of that he and my dad did not get along and did not agree on a lot of things. He carried the mail and could carry a gun. Uncle Berm and a neighbor got into a fight over their dogs and the man met him at the mail box. The neighbor said, ‘I’m going to get you,’ and Uncle Berm shot him. He spent six years in jail for that. Someone at the store said Uncle Berm was a murderer and a man jumped over the counter and said, ‘You take that back. You say he was not a murderer and did it in self defense.’ The man took it back.”

Ormeda’s eyes twinkled, as if Uncle Berm was cleared of any wrong doing because the man in the store had said it. I knew she believed Uncle Berm had done it in self defense.

After the story, she sang two songs to me. It was hard for her to breathe and she could hardly sing, but I knew one song was an Indian song, and old songs from her childhood.

A phone call interrupted the card game Jack and I was playing with Cliff and Lorna at their home. “A game warden is in the meadow watching for poachers.”

Halfway across the meadow, Jack stopped alongside the warden’s clearly labeled van.

“What are you doing on this property?” Jack asked in a not-too-friendly voice.

“Just doing my job. I’ve been coming here for ten years.”

“I’m Jack, Ormeda’s oldest son. Do you have permission?”

“Harold told me Ormeda said I could do it. Are you the son I arrested a few years ago?”

“No, that was my brother, Max. He got a raw deal out of that. Represented himself. Had to pay a fine.”

“I was just doing my job. He was guilty.”

Jack told what he thought had happened. The warden told how he remembered it. Jack said, “It was on his mother’s property. That should have made a difference.”

“What’s poaching?” I asked, wanting to change the subject.

“Poaching is hunting on someone’s property without permission. If you flash a light at a deer from a car that is illegal. If you step out of the car and flash the light, that is legal. Chasing deer with the car lights is illegal, too.”

“Ormeda’s in charge here. If she said it’s all right, just do a good job.” Jack’s attitude had changed.

Jack went straight to the cabin where his cousins were staying while they hunted. A sister of the hunters had heard the game warden was there, and had

come to warn them, too.

“Of all the places in the county, why do they come here?” she asked. Good question, I thought.

Jack went to talk to his mother. “Mom, let me tell the game warden to stay off your property.” Jack persuaded, threatened, begged, but Ormeda would not consent.

“It’s up to you and Betty. I’d do it for you if you want.” Jack should know by now she wasn’t going to do anything without talking it over with Betty. Why did he allow himself to be open for rejection? It made him upset, and he used bad language and his voice was too loud. Ormeda was angry and upset. Jack’s ideas were right, his approach was wrong. To protect his cousins, he went to the cabin to warn them.

Sunday when we were leaving, Ormeda said, “I may be here when you come back, and I may not,” meaning she might die. Never had she said anything like this to us before.

“I love you, Ormeda, and I know you care for me. We’re not gushy, gushy. We’ve done very well, two women for forty-three years that have gotten along. A respect for each other, too.” She nodded her head.

Jack knelt on his knees before his mother.

“I love you, Mom.”

“I love you, too.”

“It’s hard to concede love, isn’t it? Mom, I didn’t mean to upset you about the game warden. You can’t hear and I can’t hear, and it’s like we’re screaming at each other. You do what you want.” He knew she would anyway.

## Chapter 57

### Senile

A snow storm had everything a mess. Ray had plowed the driveway.

Dorothy Walker Bush, 91, died on November 19, 1992, shortly after President Bush visited her. She had a stroke. Funeral would be Monday in Greenwich, Connecticut.

It was getting near deer hunting season again. Ormeda said this was the worst time of the year for her, yet with Jack's forceful persistence, signed permission slips for all the men at the cabin and they could hunt on her property. Jack was putting the four-wheeler on the trailer to go down and be with the boys.

I got the mail. Jack usually got the mail and after sorting through it for what he wanted, gave me the junk mail, but I got it because he was outside. There was a letter from my brother's widow of seven years.

"Enjoyed your letter. Glad you had a nice trip. I envy you having Jack alive and well "to grow old with". I sure do miss Ed.

"Well, my kids decided I should move closer to them, so Susan got busy and here I am living in an apartment in Columbus Senior Citizen Apartment. Guess this is my new home as the kids are putting the house up for sale. I'm not too thrilled or happy over their decision, but they gave me no choice and before I could say 'No' I found the house up for sale. I wish they had let me at least go thru my household belongings and choose and save what I wanted to. I didn't have that option at all."

Jack came in from the garage and I shoved the letter toward him. "They had no right to do this to her. She's human. They could have talked it over with her." I was crying.

"Don't judge too quickly. Wait till you get the other side." He was trying to help.

I had taken sides. I told Bob and Ray they'd better never do this to me, regardless of my condition. I told them to say, "We think this is best for you at this time," and to try to make me understand.

I answered Peggy's letter. "It is hard to give up the past and accept the new. Thank you and the family for all the good times we had at your home.

When we can, we will visit you in Columbus.”

Every time I thought of her letter, I cried. My feelings were trying to accept the fact that Ed and his family at Paul Markslestown were no more. I could never visit them again, the family, Ed smoking his pipe, the dog, his journals were gone forever.

I sat in the living room, only the tick-tock of the cuckoo clock to keep me company. Jack was at the cabin hunting. He was near if Ormeda needed him. It was November 23, 1992, exactly three years ago Ormeda fell in the tub. I remembered the trip out of the holler expecting to see her at the window, and now she will never return to the window for a cigarette and a cup of coffee. She only walks from the sofa to the bathroom using Charlie, her walker.

The dreary day was a reminder of the mist that had fallen over Jack’s family for three long years. Jack and I had neither seen or spoke to Betty since the meeting.

I thought of Ed’s wife and the sudden exit from her home. I called her daughter.

“She is bad, Aunt Lenore. She’s not there. You know, the lights are on, but no one’s at home. She had no conception of time and space. She got lost in town, and filed a police report her car was stolen. Her hair and clothing were dirty. You should have seen her refrigerator. Awful! The doctor told us she could not go back home.” I listened. The same way they did Aunt Molly.

“Our family is torn apart, bad, really bad. Two of us wanted to bring her home and get care for her and phase her gently into this. Two wanted to do it now. Frank wasn’t there. The doctors think it might be an environmental hazard, formaldehyde. You know dad blew newspaper into the walls for insulation.”

“Yes, I know. Remember we were in that class action law suit about formaldehyde in our insulation. They really don’t have too much information and statistics about it.”

“Aunt Lenore, I feel better after talking to you.”

“I feel better, too.” I did. I felt sorry for Peggy, for the children, for the big mess, and for my brother who was trying to save money when he pumped shredded newspaper in the walls and now this might be partially the cause of Peggy’s problem. He never knew.

## Chapter 58

# Another Christmas

Jack returned from the Thanksgiving hunting trip. He had no deer, but had lots of fun. I welcomed him home. We completed shopping for Bob and his family and on December 7th, Pearl Harbor Day, the Day of Infamy that started World War II, mailed four huge boxes to Seattle. Again, I remembered my dad and two deceased brothers from World War I and II and the emotional and health damages

President Bush, in his last days as president, accepted the United Nations agreement for the United States to intercede in Somalia, Africa to feed the starving millions, many children. On December 8, 1992, the marines moved in. Food would follow. Operation Restore Hope was the first time in history the United States had interceded in another country for humanitarian concerns.

Jack's mother wanted to know if we were coming home for Christmas. Betty would be home December 23rd.

"No, Mama. Betty and I don't get along too well. She stepped on me pretty hard. I love Betty and pray about it, but I'm not ready to forget yet."

Then to me, he said, "Mama cut me short. She didn't like what I said about Betty. Wait until Betty gets this letter from Mr. Rexroad. Maybe it'll be there before she leaves Colorado."

In the letter Jack was asking Betty to negotiate before taking it upon herself to take the free gas rights for her cabin without consulting the others who shared ownership.

Gene said, "I don't ever plan to use it, so let her have it."

Max was undecided.

Jack acted alone. To me it was another example of underhandedness to get what she wanted without including her brothers.

I did not know what to do. Should I mail Iris a Christmas card? What did she want? She had not wanted to see me. I found the card I'd bought specially for her, "To a Wonderful Sister and Brother-in-Law at Christmas". It ended, "Love and Happiness Always". I signed it, "Jack and Lenore". I mailed it with the other cards. Had I done the right thing?

I yearned for acceptance from Iris the way I yearned for acceptance from

Ormeda after she grabbed the gown out of my hand, accused the food I gave her of causing diarrhea and wanted Debbie to prepare Christmas dinner. I had not helped Ormeda in any way, or offered to, since then except to empty her "pee" can. I talked with her and that was it. Now I was in a similar position with my sister.

When least expected, acceptance came from Ormeda. Every time Jack stopped to visit her during the hunting season, she asked, "Where's Lenore? I miss Lenore." She told her sister Vi and Lorna she missed me. I had done nothing for her lack of acceptance, except by accepting me it made others feel less accepted. She wanted me and missed me. This was quite an accomplishment after her complete rejection of me. I won by doing nothing for her.

I called Ormeda. I told her about the "thirteenth" check teachers in Ohio get, a bonus from good investments made by the retirement system. This year my check was for \$441-. It was kind of special money.

"That should cover Christmas," she told me.

"I buy bonds and clothes. Money comes hard."

"Betty will stay five days when she comes in. I'm going to try to make it till then."

I did not talk about how many days she had to live, or how she was feeling. I thought she had enough of this with others.

"My mother always set goals for herself. If I don't get to see you, Merry Christmas, Ormeda," I said with compassion.

With as much compassion as I had, she answered, "Merry Christmas to you. Jennifer had a long article about sex published in the school paper."

"I'll bet she is a good writer."

Ormeda's answer was always, "I'm all right" when any one asked her how she was feeling. For years, this was her answer until December 17th she answered, "I don't feel well. I've got a bug. Jack, I want you to stop on your way to Florida to see Bob." Jack and I were visiting Bob and his family from January 6th through the 13th when Bob would chair a conference there. The special request from Ormeda was admittance and acceptance of failing health and old age.

Iris and my Christmas cards passed in the mail. In her handwriting, she wrote, "Misty you have a beautiful Christmas and enjoy all that is in store for you at this most joyous time of year." It was signed, "Howard and Iris".

I loved Iris. I called to thank her for the card and find out if they were well. Howard had been in and out of the hospital so many times.

"I don't want to talk about it," but she did. "Howard got dizzy and we took him in. They put him in intensive care again. Medication helped. He's doing all right now." The doctor's checked

her out, too, and gave her antibodies for a bronchial infection.

I did not mail a card to Betty, nor did we receive one. I did mail a card to Kurt and Debbie.

A card from Ed's daughter told me about Peggy's forgetfulness and new living arrangements. "I hope you feel better about this. I understand that you were upset. We all were and still are, but are accepting what happened. It is

like this. If her body failed her, it would be so much easier to accept, but to see your own mother decline mentally and become like one of your own children is extremely heartbreaking and distressing. It also makes me realize that I, too, am getting older. Dad knew about a year before he did that Mom was 'losing her mind', as he called it. He would be pleased with the manner she is being cared for."

I appreciated the note and Susan taking time out of her busy life with four children to consider my feelings. I was pleased Peggy was in a nice retirement home, but could not understand the way it was handled. Susan had Power of Attorney and would administer the will. Others had been hurt with this decision. Susan had been a jewel to me.

I decided I would fake my condition as long as possible. Then I'd say, "I'm sick. Someone take care of me."

## Chapter 59

# Avoiding Betty

Jack, Ray and I spent Christmas together with dinner and gift exchange. Paul and Betty were at Ormeda's and we avoided contact with them, or anyone that might be at the farm house.

The gifts from Seattle were creative, and gifts bought in China and Spain. The children sewed two hundred white buttons on a red sweat shirt and sent it to me, "like snowflakes" they said. Monika sent pictures of all of them. From their travels, they gave us a bracelet, silk tie and scarf, a sword for Jack and a cross bow for Ray. Very precious was a package from Marilee with three precious pennies taped on the package.

We ate again with Gene and Eula and their family. I told Eula, "If anything happens to Ormeda, I hope I do not talk too much but I will support Jack, even though I might not always agree with him. I will not let him bankrupt us." We laughed.

Jack could not stand the suspense of not knowing what was happening at the farm. He called Dreama.

"Your mother had a lot of anxieties about Betty traveling but settled down after she arrived. She has not had a bowel movement for two days. After Christmas, she became quiet. Helen furnished a small artificial tree and I brought decorations. Paul and Betty decorated the tree. Betty looks well and Ormeda still does not know about the heart attack."

It was the Christmas season, but my thoughts about Betty were not what Jesus might want. "I'm sorry, Betty, you're going to have to come down off the pedestal you've put yourself upon. You're going to have to accept you have three intelligent brothers and share with them. I'm sure, Betty, when you went to Basil Smith this morning and couldn't get the free gas and oil without permission from your brothers, you found out you were family, and would have to work together as a family. Jack called your bluff before it happened. Too bad we can't talk, except through the lawyer. What you did this morning was kind of sneaky, wasn't it? What did you tell your mother? Now you understand the brothers you pushed aside are real and do exist. Grow up, Betty, grow up."

## Chapter 60

### Iris

Iris is my older sister by two years. Iris made the path and I followed. Iris advised and I listened. Iris took the knocks and I was protected. I loved Iris. I respected her. She was my heroine.

Somewhere in our schooling, I was advanced two years and was in the same graduating class as Iris. We attended college together, got our first schools teaching near each other, and Iris was there for me. She married young, but Howard was in the military, and she waited for his return. They never had children. Iris was always the center of the stage.

Jack and I tried to visit Howard and Iris on our trips, since we passed their home. They were always gracious, but now things were different. Jack encouraged me to visit them and he'd stay in the car, just a short visit to let them know we'd be gone a while.

Howard met me at the door. I liked his friendliness. Iris came in from the kitchen. She was shorter than I, and as always, looked neat and well kept.

"What are you doing here?" She was angry and her voice demanding. "You took my pictures," and she put her hand on her heart. "Those pictures meant the world to me. My own dear mother handed them to me, just like this, my mother," and she extended her hand toward me as if giving me something.

I did not know what she was talking about. "Iris, I am not a thief. I did not take any pictures. I "ate crow" to be here. Jack wouldn't even come in."

I started toward the door to leave. I had talked too loudly, but needed to be understood.

Iris got between me and the door, pushed me toward a chair, and locked the door. "Sit down and let's talk this out," and she motioned toward the chair.

"You act like two little girls," Howard said, hoping to calm our feelings. He twisted his hair.

"Don't do that, Howard. Don't get nervous" Then to me, "I thought you took them for Bob."

"No, Iris, no. I would never do that."

"Who took them then?"

“I don’t know.” I could see the agony and pain she had been through and that her mind had dwelt on this for hours. I felt sorry for her. “If they mean that much to you, you can go through all my photo albums and take the ones that belong to you. This does not mean I took them from you, though.”

I did not know how those pictures got in my possession. I showed them to her during a visit many months ago. I thought they were mine.

“I thought you and Justine were “conniving” against me.”

“Iris, we love you. We would never do that. Think of all you have done for us. I would ask you if I wanted anything. A stranger wouldn’t want those pictures, though, so it had to be someone in the family.”

“I’ll tell you how upset I was. I even considered writing a new will and leaving Justine and you out.” She said this haltingly, as if she didn’t know whether she should say it or not.

“That’s your choice.”

“I got through it by praying,” she said.

“You went to the right person, Jesus, God. Howard Stanley had a service about anxieties. I listed my anxieties and one of them was my relationship with you. We both were praying about it. Maybe this is an answer to prayer.” I put my arm around her. “I knew you did not want to see me, and I stayed away a year.”

“I couldn’t handle it,” and I could see that was true. Instead, she had fretted about it.

“Stay away from Howard’ brother and I’ll tell you why. He thinks everyone’s after his money.”

“I can understand that. I’ve seen other people like that.”

“He got five cards for Christmas and went through each of them to see if they were after his money. I only told Pauline and him about you and the pictures, no one else.”

Howard went out to the car and Jack came in with him.

As we were leaving, Iris said to me, “Help me, Lenore, help me solve this mystery.” She thought maybe someone had come into their house and taken the pictures while they were gone and given them to me. All I knew was I had the pictures, and thought they were mine. How I got them now became a puzzle.

I rode miles, silent, puzzled, exploring every avenue of how I became the owner of those pictures. I did not tell Jack what had happened.

Then a thought flashed in my mind. I’d call Iris. No, it was safer to write. On scrap paper, I wrote: Wilderness Plantation Inn, Jane Lew, W. Va.,

Does this make sense? I think it does possibly, because of timing, timing as to when I had the basement remodeled and the time of Mom’s death and the time I found the “box”.

After retirement, two or three years ago, I was in a storage space where I kept Christmas decorations. I found a box I never looked in, way back in the corner of an enclosed closet. Out of curiosity, I opened the box. It was not a shoe box, but square and taller. I found pictures which I thought were mine from Mom’s house. Monika encouraged me to make photo albums and I put them with others in the album.

Loopholes in this idea are:

1. You said they left the frames when they took the pictures.
2. You said they were in your house.

To endorse this could have happened, remember the army picture of Howard and his regiment I found and mailed to you. It could have been those pictures were in my house from the time of Mom's death till two years ago, when I found them. Why would I have shown them to you, if I stole them. If they would have been left in the house at Sand Fork, they would have burned.

Is this the solution? I am innocent, except I had the pictures. I don't know what else to say. You are welcome to them. I'm glad I've had you for a sister. Happy New Year. Please think about this. Could this be the answer? When did you last see them in your house? Where were they? I hope we can resolve this. Love, Lenore.

I mailed the letter. I did not tell Jack. I could not think of anything but my sister, Iris.

My mind was still twirling about the visit with my sister, when I walked into the living room at Ormeda's. It was New Year's Eve, 1992, waiting for 1993. This was the way the old year was leaving, me concerned for my sister and her feelings.

Ormeda, Jack and I were alone to watch in the New Year.

## Chapter 61

# The Last New Year

A loneliness surrounded us as Ormeda, Jack and I sat in the living room. The “help” was given the night off.

“Ormeda, do you know why we like the New Year? We don’t know what is going to happen.” She thought this was funny, but true, and we laughed.

“I’m not going to watch the new year in. I’m exhausted. I’m going to bed. Jack and you can watch it in together.”

“Do you want me to wait up and call you when it’s twelve o’clock?”

“No, you’re tired. Thanks anyway.”

“Ting-a-ling-ling,” exactly at twelve midnight the tinkle of a bell sounded in the old farm house, breaking the stillness of the hour. Ormeda was ringing in the New Year with a Christmas Day gift bell, away from the big city celebrations, just the three of us. I called in from the bedroom, “Thank you, Ormeda. Happy New Year!” The next day we celebrated by wearing new bedroom slippers we’d received as gifts.

Dreama arrived, back from her days off. “Betty thinks she’s superior to the rest of us, but she grew up here and has the same background as the rest of us..”

“We think alike about that. I think she thinks she’s superior, too.”

“I think she’s having financial problems. Last year she gave Helen and I one hundred fifty dollars each for Christmas. This year she didn’t.”

“What did she get Ormeda?”

“She told her the trip home would be her gift. Paul fixed the back steps and they got her three new fire extinguishes.” Interesting, I thought, since Jack had installed extinguishers.

“Dreama, I want to say something that has been on my mind. I wanted to get Helen and you something for Christmas, but I won’t do anything to come between Betty and you or to compete with Betty. Maybe some day.”

“The relationship I have with you is quite different from the one I have with Betty.” I understood.

Jack and I left New Year’s Day for Orlando, Florida for a seven day visit with Bob and his family. They were flying in from Seattle and we would meet

there. We also would visit with Justine and Junior, who were there in the RV. I needed to talk to Justine about the pictures and the visit with Iris. I had to talk with someone.

Bob's family stayed at The Dolphin, a hotel at Disney Land Resorts, and Jack and I stayed at the Delta, near Universal Studios, less expensive. For seven days we vacationed, and Bob, Monika and Marilee got on the plane to return to Seattle. Jeremiah and Josh stayed with us, and we'd drive them home a month from now.

The four of us went to Camper's World to stay overnight with Justine and Junior. The children wanted to see Mac again.

"Justine, I need to talk to you. Iris thinks I took pictures from her house."

"I know about that. Iris talked to me about it."

"She said you and I were together on it, and she might disinherit us from her will."

Justine laughed.

"No, nothing was resolved. I know one thing, she will get those pictures as soon as I can get them to her."

Junior took us to Homosassa Springs while Justine took art lessons with Mr. Jenkins. After one night with them, we left for home.

"We'll eat breakfast on the road," I told Junior. We had not driven far when we decided to eat at the Waffle House. We were coming out the door when we saw Junior.

"What are you doing here? We just left you at Camper's World." Jack said, teasing Junior.

Junior braced himself, and holding back tears, began. "Your mother's in intensive care in the hospital at Westlake. She had a stroke, they think."

"How did they find you?"

"Someone called the girl living in our house. She called Karen and Karen called us. I was lucky to find you and catch up with you." It was evident this had been hard for Junior, who knew Ormeda well and had just recently lost his own mother. Junior would do anything for Jack, and Jack felt the same way about him.

I cried. I sobbed. I knew I should be brave for Jack, Jeremiah and Josh. I wasn't.

"Thank you, Junior. Thank you."

Our plans changed. We would go straight to the hospital.

We thought about the miracle of us receiving the message. How did Lorna get the number at Junior's home? How did they get Justine and Junior at Camper's World since they just moved in and it was not on their original schedule? How did Junior know where we would eat?

Each time we entered a different state we would yell, and each of us eat a Florida orange. Jack drove fifteen hours through six states and we were at a Super-8 in Westlake.

Jack entered the hospital alone at three A.M. to visit his mother. The nurse told Jack Ormeda had reacted more to his visit than anyone's since her admittance.

Jack returned to the motel as soon as he could. Ormeda had watched the news about Iran and Saddam Hussein and fallen asleep. After a long nap, Helen could not awaken her. When they lifted her arm, it flopped down. Dreama came. They called an ambulance.

It was important that Jeremiah and Josh see their Grandmother Ormeda. She knew we were going to stop on our way home from Florida, and was expecting them. When we entered the hospital room, her head was resting on her shoulder, her tongue was thick, and her mouth drooped. Her eyes were watering and she was hooked to IV's.

Jeremiah and Josh saw Ormeda for the first time.

"Hi, Grandma," Jeremiah said gently and lovingly, and patted her arm.

"Hi," Ormeda answered. Jack put Jeremiah's hand in hers. "This is Jeremiah." Then Jack put Josh's hand in hers. "This is Josh."

"Josh," she said. She knew.

Max and Melba were on their way from Florida. Max had changed his mind. He wanted to see his mother, even though he said he'd never come to her funeral. We'd wait for Max.

Jack and I left Ormeda's bedside so Max and Melba could visit with her alone. He later told us Ormeda knew who he was.

We all thought Ormeda was better and decided to eat at Plantation Inn, a few miles from the hospital.

Max and Melba left for Florida.

Gene and Eula had already left for Ohio.

Jack and I, with our grandsons, returned to our home in Ohio.

The nephew, leader of the Boy Scout Troop, also returned to Ohio.

All of us returned home. Ormeda was in the hands of the doctors and nurses.

## Chapter 62

# Ormeda Dies

Ormeda died alone, with no family members present. After four days in the hospital, her wish had almost been granted, "If I have one day to live, I want to live it at home."

Sixteen days after we watched in the New Year together, on January 16th, 1993 at 10:45 P.M. Ormeda was gone from this earth.

Howard and Iris expected my call to be one to congratulate them on their fifty-first wedding anniversary. Instead, it was the message of Ormeda's death. Iris was my sister and Howard was a cousin of Jack's and Ormeda had been his teacher, so I thought they should know. The pictures were not mentioned.

Jack spent the day on the phone. I got the clothes ready for the trip back to W. Va. and the funeral.

Betty arrived at the farm. She did not call. She did not consult Jack about any funeral arrangements.

Bob would fly from Seattle into Cleveland and he and Ray would drive down together.

At four o'clock in the morning, Jack, Jeremiah, Josh and I began the long trip back to the day we knew would come, Ormeda's funeral.

Ormeda

Ormeda, how I reached out to you.

As a mother reaches out to her child.

As God reaches out to His children.

I never knew you.

I knew your rejection.

I felt your control.

I saw your strength.

You welcomed me into your home.

You were grandmother to my children.

Teacher of many

Your innerself a secret.

You passed knowledge on to others,

You instilled morals in the young.

Nature was your friend.  
But, who are you?  
What is the armor that surrounds you?  
Do you love?  
Do you feel God's presence?  
Can you share feelings?  
How can I weaken that armor?  
How can I know you?  
How can you know me?  
Perhaps, never.  
We are not indestructible.  
Our hair is gray.  
Have we been silent and content too long?  
Life fades and death comes.

Death came. Ormeda's armor weakened. She had showed she cared and missed me. Now it was my turn to miss her.

This was the first day at the farm without Ormeda, and without her forever. I followed Jack through the living room door. Betty, from out of nowhere, came toward Jack with outstretched arms. Jack froze.

"I'm not ready to get cuddly yet," and he passed her and went on into the living room.

She came toward me. "How do you feel?" and she was looking me straight in the eye. This was really a stupid question with many answers. Ormeda was dead. How did I feel? She was there. How did I feel? I had traveled for six hours. How did I feel?

I heard Jack's answer. "I don't know how I feel?" and at that moment felt revenge toward her.

Betty turned quickly and stomped into the dining room. She'd received our message.

Why did she come to meet us? Everything would've been all right, if we could've blended with the family. We didn't need or want her special attention at this time.

Suddenly I knew how I felt. I was hot, fluttering inside. I went to the bathroom and put cold water on my face. Dreama brought me a glass of water. I had to get rid of this feeling. I did not want to be the one to stir up more trouble.

"I got sick coming around those curves," I alibied.

Dreama whispered to me. "Paul has spoken to you twice. Did you hear?"

The picture was clear. Paul and Betty wanted to eliminate any possible friction with Jack and I. I spoke to Paul.

It didn't take long to recognize Betty's plan of action. She wanted to get each person by themselves and get their thoughts and feelings. I fell for her trap.

As with her mother, she lead into pulling out your thoughts. "I don't understand how things happened." I thought she meant the meeting and what had happened since then, not her mother's illness and death.

“Betty, I cannot speak for Jack. I can only speak for myself.” I had learned at Cleveland State never to speak for anyone else. “I felt we were left out.”

“That was your choice.” She meant we were the ones who said we’d talk only through a lawyer. Couldn’t she understand we did this because we were being ignored?

“And some people think you feel superior to the rest of us.”

Betty looked out the window. “They’re digging Mother’s grave,” and she began to cry. I hugged her.

Everyone ate from the table loaded with food relatives and friends had sent in. “We didn’t know so many would be eating,” made us feel less than welcome.

## Chapter 63

# Getting the Facts

I do not know how Jack received the message of his mother's death. I think it may have been a phone call from Gene. I did know Betty had contacted him in no way at any time.

Jack decided it best we stay at a motel instead of the cabin. Bob and Ray would arrive shortly. We were surprised, and pleased, when Gene and Jack checked into a room next to ours.

Eula came over to visit.

"I know nothing about what's going on," I told her. She had the information, I thought from Betty. I wrote,

Wednesday, January 19th, 1993

Visiting hours: 1:15-1:30 Family 2:00 General Public 6:00-8:00 Everyone  
Funeral: 12:00-1:00 At the church, viewing. 1:00 Funeral

Reverend Murphy would conduct the service and the singers would be from the Sand Fork Baptist Church. Each would be paid fifty dollars.

The cost of the funeral was four thousand seven hundred fifty dollars, coffin was sixteen hundred, vault seven hundred. Ormeda had money for this and any left over would go on hospital expenses. No tombstone had been bought.

The will would be recorded. Copies would be distributed Tuesday.

The help Betty had employed would receive workman's compensation.

Betty's expenses doubled what she paid out for Ormeda's keep.

I appreciated Eula giving us the information, but could not help but know that Jack had been left out, just as I had told Betty. I felt sorry for Jack but he accepted it as part of her behavior.

The family met at the farm house. I don't think they thought we would be there. Paul tried to be friendly.

"I'm sorry, Paul. I may not have heard Betty right when I approached you. I'm laughing, but it was awful. When I entered the living room and she got out of her chair and said, 'I'm going to clear the air' I thought she meant I contaminated the air. I took it out on you. I left the room and you followed me."

"No, you went around the house."

“Yes, that’s right.” I remembered going around the house to get fresh air and to get rid of my anger. “We met in the kitchen. It was awful, wasn’t it?”

“For us, too. When we arrived, we saw all the cars. We thought all of you had come to throw Debbie out of the “schoolhouse”. We wanted no part of that.”

“No, no. The purpose of the meeting was about Ormeda’s care. That was about the time the family knew more help would be needed, other than Helen. We got onto other subjects. It was awful.” I was laughing. Paul understood.

“I know.”

“When the boys were talking about all the work they had done on the farm and Ormeda came to the door and screamed, ‘What are you doing, dividing the farm?’ that was awful, too. She apologized later. We were all tired, hot and it was late in the day. If it would have been in the morning, it might have been different.” It might have.

## Chapter 64

# Ormeda's Funeral

I had learned one thing, Paul and Betty did not know ahead of time about the meeting and its purpose. She had been left out as she was used to leaving others out. This may have caused some of the friction.

The funeral home at Glenville brought the embalmed body of Ormeda back to the country church across the meadow from the farm house. The pallbearers carried the casket from the hurst to the front of the church. The people glared at us, as Jack and I with our grandchildren, sat in the second pew. Bob and Ray, with the other poll bearers, sat on the left side of the church.

The coffin was open, with the corpse of Ormeda in full view. Jeremiah and Josh had never been to a funeral before, so they stared in silence.

The soft piano music stopped. There was silence, silence. Then the church bell chimed, the bell that communicated to Ormeda each Sunday that it was time for church to begin. Two white candles were lit by a young girl, and the minister sang, "The Old Rugged Cross". Reverend Murphy read scriptures, ending, "I am Alpha and Omega".

Reverend Murphy introduced Dr. Bob Marks, who would read the obituary.

"Ormeda Marks was born in Gilmer County on September 20, 1903. She is the daughter of the late Ulysses Grant and Sara Stout Moore. In 1926 she married James T. Marks, who preceded he in death in 1973.

"Surviving children were given, and 12 grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren.

"She was preceded in death by one son, Junior in 1980 and two brothers and one granddaughter.

"Ormeda Marks was a graduate of both Sand Fork High School and Glenville State College. She taught elementary school in Gilmer and Lewis Counties, and in Ohio. She is a member of the W. Va. Retired Teachers Association and the National Retired Teachers Association.

"Ormeda Marks's name appears on the one room school teacher's plaque placed at Cedar Creek State Park. She received the Women's State Outstanding Basketball Players Award in 1920.

"Ormeda Marks, age 89, departed this life at 10:30 P.M. Saturday, January 16, 1993 at the Stonewall Jackson Memorial Hospital in Westlake following a

short illness. Ormeda lived on 282 acres of her family's homestead in Blackburn community, Gilmer County.

"She is a former trustee of the Blackburn United Methodist Church where she is also a member.

"On January 20, 1993, today, Ormeda Marks will be buried in the Blackburn Cemetery.

" I Corinthians 15: 55-57

"Oh death, where is thy sting?

"Oh, death, where is thy victory?

"Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Bob , the oldest grandchild, honored his grandmother in the presentation of the eulogy, and honored me as a son.

He concluded the scriptures with tears in his eyes.

Scripture: 23rd Psalm

Song: Amazing Grace

Service: Open Gates and Open Doors, the topic suggested by a family member, which was me. The subject was developed as Reverend Murphy included the many gates and doors Ormeda opened in motherhood, as a grandmother, a teacher, in basketball and as a spiritual advisor. He concluded saying Ormeda often told him she had the "punies". When he didn't visit her, she said he had the "punies".

Poem: I'm Free, Author Unknown

Song: I Feel the Touch

Closing Prayer

Recessional

The mourners walked from the church to the hillside cemetery. There she was laid to rest, January 20th, 1993, inaugural day of John Clifton, new president of the United States. None of us heard the ceremonies nor had we missed them.

## Chapter 65

# After the Funeral

Jack had copies of the will from the court house, so when Betty was ready to hand them out, it was no big surprise. The in-laws were excluded.

The will equally divided the estate among the five children, including Junior's heirs. I gave Jack credit for this. The girls had never seen the first will excluding them.

Jack told Betty, "With a snap of a finger and a phone call, I could erase you administering the will."

"But Ma-ma wanted me to do it."

"Maybe you don't qualify," Jack said, referring to conflict of interest between having Power of Attorney and administering the will.

A trust for the farm was discussed but Betty and Max voted against it.

Betty announced, "I want my own piece and I'm going to put a fence around it."

Bob thought the trust would be a good idea and explained it to me.

The rain was pounding on the tin roof of the cabin. The flowers Aunt Vi and Norma Jean gave me brightened the dreariness of the day. Bob, Ray, Jeremiah and Josh were asleep upstairs. Jack told me he was going down to help itemize Ormeda's personal possessions. Gene and Eula would be there. I was alone, frying bacon for the men folks.

I was happy Jack was being included in itemizing the items. I thought about the flowers Howard and Iris had sent. I thought about Reverend Murphy using "Open Gates and Open Doors", my suggestion, for the service. Bob had read the eulogy. Aunt Vi had given me the school house arrangement of flowers from her sister's funeral. Norma Jean had given me her flowers. We hadn't been left out. We had been included in special ways and by special people more than I thought.

Jack was at the door. Something was wrong.

"I made a fool of myself again."

"What happened?"

"All I said was I didn't want anything sold that was here when Dad died, it was a tenth mine."

“What did she say?”

“She said, ‘That’s a bucket of shit.’ Then she said the only reason I could be at Mom’s house was because she allowed me to be.” This was the day after the funeral and Betty was telling him he had no right in his mother’s house.

“As I was leaving, I told her I’d probably never see her again. I looked her straight in the eye and said, ‘I hope your back bone falls through your asshole and gives you a headache’. Betty said, ‘And you consider yourself a Christian?’”

“Then what?”

“I told her pagans always latch into that and that I hoped she wasn’t my judge. As I was leaving, I ask Gene if he would administer the will and he said he would, he just wanted to get this thing over.”

“Come on, Bob, come and go with me. We’re going to see a lawyer.” The rain was pouring, as they left in the Town Car.

Coming toward the cabin, through the mud, in the rain, were Gene and Eula. I met them at the door.

“Betty told us to get out, too. I only wanted to be helpful.” This was the most upset I had ever seen Gene.

We moved in the bedroom to protect Jeremiah and Josh from what was happening.

“I don’t think Betty would cheat me,” he said.

“No, I don’t think Betty would cheat. My thing about Betty is she does things on her own without including you boys. Bob thinks Betty is on a feminist high. He understands because he gets on them. I think she’s never had children and don’t know how to work together as a family.”

“I like Paul. I told Betty Paul would make two of her. She says as of now she was administer of the will and the house was closed to all people.”

Eula was upset, too. “She was using big words and Gene asked her to use words he understood. I don’t think she wanted us to understand. She said she never wanted to come down to that level. Betty did not want to hear when Gene said he didn’t care what happened to the farm. He told her we did not have a right-of-way to the cabin. That was a big mistake.”

Betty hired Dreama and Helen to take inventory and package things.

Gene and I agreed. We liked Paul. Betty would not cheat. The farm would be sold. The farm, as we had known it, would never be again.

Gene and Eula stopped to say good-by to Betty. “I am quick to forgive,” he said.

## Chapter 66

# Into the Creek

Ormeda once said, “My children will never fight over my estate.” This was the time that would test that statement.

Bob and his dad returned from seeing the lawyer. Betty could not keep them out of the house, but why force the issue? The lawyer advised Jack to let Betty administer the will “since she had been stripped of all her power.”

A pick-up truck was plowing through the muddy ruts in the road. We could see Jeremiah was in the seat by the driver. The young driver got out. “He lost control of the four-wheeler and jumped off just before the four-wheeler went in the creek. We were watching from Ormeda’s. It scared us. I ran down to see if he were all right. I need some help to get the four-wheeler out.” Ray volunteered.

“Aren’t you going to be mad at me, Grand dad?” This was Jeremiah’s greatest concern.

“No, grandson, as long as you’re safe. Everyone has a tumble or two when they first learn to ride. You did learn something, didn’t you?”

“I surely did. I’m glad I was wearing my helmet. I was scared. I jumped just in time. The four-wheeler landed in limbs and branches from trees. They said if I hadn’t jumped, I could have been killed.”

“Come here, Jeremiah,” and I hugged him. We promised not to tell his father he had gone beyond the gate, the limit that was set for him.

“You’re not mad at me.”

“Of course not.”

Bob and Ray left early for home. Bob would go back to Seattle.

Rain and more rain. Mud and more mud. There was no use staying here. Eyes from the farm house peered at us as we left early, pulling a muddy four-wheeler. We did not stop to say good-bye. We would not force the issue that Betty could not keep us out of the farm house. We knew they were glad we were gone.

There were no good-byes to Ormeda this time. The last good-bye was over.

Paul and Betty left for Colorado that evening. Helen and Dreama would finish cleaning, packing, and labeling. Ormeda’s belongings now became a record

for settling the estate.

## Chapter 67

# Betty and the Mice Take Over

The big farm house was now empty except for the mice that came to search for food and get out of the cold. Dreama and Helen had scattered moth balls among the important papers and pictures of the family as a protection against the mice. They cut broom sticks and placed them diagonally in the upper part of the window to keep out burglars. The house was secure from visitors, phone calls, the loving care from Dreama and Helen, waiting on 282 acres of land with an unknown fate.

Jack mailed Betty an accounting of \$4,000-he had that was Ormeda's, including the cost of the stoves, \$583- he paid himself for the money she owed him for right of ways, and \$1,000- he mailed Make that was left over.

At home, I carefully placed the flowers from Norma Jean and Justine and the musical schoolhouse from Aunt Vi in my living room. I wanted them to be a reminder of the people who cared enough to give them to me. I tried to forget any negative feelings toward Ormeda. I tried to forget Betty who excluded Jack and I from her life until the last few years, and then to dominate, manipulate, and be authoritative. There were those who cared.

A twenty-four hour monitor on Jack's heart showed irregularity. Dr. Parker prescribed medication. The same day a letter arrived from Betty, signed Sis. I don't know why the "Sis" upset me, unless it was her hypocrisy. For years, Jack had been ignored, and now she was playing up this "Sis" stuff.

The letter began, "Dear Heir of Ormeda Marks." I tried to summarize each paragraph.

Jack thought she was doing what she should do as Executrix of the will.

## Chapter 68

# Sugar Daddy

Jack, Jeremiah and Josh and I were making plans for our drive to Seattle. We would leave a day later than we thought, until the doctor was sure Jack's medicine regulated his heart beat. Lorna called to see how he was getting along.

"Dreama and Helen will work through the month of February to finish the work at the house. Basil was upset over the impersonal way Betty asked him to get the hay out of the barn. She told him Bud was to get the best eight hundred bales . He said he would be darned if he was going through all that hay and decide which was the best. Basil passed a kidney stone, and bled, got dizzy and nearly passed out and was in no shape to do that work. What bothered me was that he was there at the house alone when it happened. Betty , in her will, is leaving her cabin to Jennifer or Misty. Eighty per cent of Ormeda's retirement check will go to Betty as long as she lives."

Betty would get back the money she paid Helen all those years. At one time, Ormeda told Jack she would will her cabin to Bob. I thought Betty had promised her mother she would look out after Jennifer after her death, and this was the reason for the change.

Jack's double first cousin from Florida called. "Betty called me. She was crying. She said she lost not only her mother but her brothers. She asked me to be there for her, she would need me."

I wondered if Betty told why she lost her brothers. I would have to search out my feelings toward Betty.

"Grandma, let's go for a walk. I need some exercise." It was ten o'clock at night, and a ten year old wanted exercise. Good, it'll help him sleep.

I put on a red coat and hat, and my old sneakers. I needed the exercise, too.

"Jeremiah, we have to be careful of the cracks in the sidewalks. One time I was having a birthday party for Ray and sent a boy to get paper plates on his bicycle. He hit one of those cracks. It threw him off his bike and broke a front tooth. I tell everyone to be careful of them."

Jeremiah and I were mid-way around the block. "You can run ahead, but wait for me at the corner." I knew I was walking too slowly for him. I began walking faster.

“Jeremiah, Jeremiah, “ I called. “I’m bleeding. Come here.” I had done what I warned him not to do. My shoe caught the raised crack, and I had fallen face forward on the concrete.

Blood was everywhere. I held Jeremiah’s arm and we started walking toward the house. I did not want the dripping blood to lead to my home. I picked up a bread wrapper on the sidewalk and wiped my nose.

When the house was in sight, I said, “Go tell Grand dad Grandma’s hurt. Tell him to come get me.”

Little Jeremiah ran as fast as he could. Jack became so excited , he fumbled to find the keys, and by the time he had the car started, I was walking up the driveway.

Jack cleaned off my face and gave me Tylenol. We were thinking of Jeremiah’s feelings. It was for him I had gone for the walk. We did not want him to have any guilt feelings.

“It will be all right,” I said but my nose was swollen and both eyes black. My glasses had crammed into my face, and the glasses were twisted with one lens broken. My forehead was bruised.

Timing was bad. We’d be leaving for Seattle in thirty hours.

The next day Jack and I both went to the doctor. Jack was able to make the trip and the X- rays showed I had no broken bones in my nose or face. I could hide the black and blue with sunglasses.

Early Tuesday morning, Jack and Jeremiah were in the front seat of the car and Josh and I were in the back seat, ready to begin our trip to Seattle. We would travel the southern route since we might encounter bad weather.

The boys learned the names of the states and their capitols. We drove miles and miles, and stopped at their maternal grandparents in Corpus Christi, Texas for three days. We visited the Alamo and San Antonio. The desert was such a contrast as to what was waiting for us in Oregon, the biggest snowstorm in years. Small compact cars , like seeds being blown, lined the highway. Rescue workers and fire trucks could not get to the cars and people needing help. Jeremiah looked at his Grand dad and said, “Are we going to die?”

Jack’s driving experience and the heavy car got us through. We had made it to Seattle to celebrate birthdays, Monika 39, Jeremiah 11, Josh 9 and Marilee 6.

It was March, so the children and I planted primroses. Jack was sick with bronchitis, and was taking antibodies. My face had changed from blue-black to yellow and then back to normal. Fourteen days and it was time to go home.

Jack drove four days, five to seven hundred miles a day. We were back in Garfield Heights. We missed Jeremiah and Josh, Jeremiah the navigator on the trip, and Josh with me in the back seat doing his school work. They were good boys, our boys, but only for a month. They had visited Florida, attended their Great-grandmother’s funeral, and traveled across the United States in a car.

Blood tests showed Jack had sugar diabetes, three times as high as it should be. He was tired, weak, and slept most of the time. The remedy was weight loss and reduction of stress. He said, ”Betty did this to me.”

Bob called him a “Sugar Daddy” and laughed.

For the first time, Iris and I talked as sisters when I called her and told her Jack had sugar diabetes. I knew this was the time to take her my photo albums for her to take her pictures.

I looked through the two photo albums, one marked "History" and one marked "Oldies". This was not going to be as easy as I thought. Taking the pictures out would leave empty spaces in the album. How did I know these were her pictures, since we grew up together, had the same friends, went to the same schools and had the same family? When I bought the home place, I bought everything in the house. Questions in my mind were planting seeds of doubt.

I'd made Iris a promise. My mother's teaching and my desire to help her overcome her feelings made me know I had to let her have the pictures. I took out pictures, here and there, pictures I thought she would want. I'd have copies made. This idea satisfied me.

I called to wish Iris happy birthday. She was seventy. I did not mention the pictures because copies were being made. I did not tell her this.

## Chapter 69

# Unpacking

Jack wanted to know what was happening with his Mother's estate. We drove six hour to the Court House and had copies made of the original deeds of the farm to Ormeda and her brothers and sisters. He visited Basil Arnold, the Fiduciary Commissioner. No debts had been turned in to him against Ormeda's estate, but could have been to Betty. We visited with Jack's relatives and exchanged pictures that were taken after Ormeda's funeral. We had an unexpected visit from Jack's cousin at the motel and she brought us pictures no one else had.

A surprise letter from Betty's lawyer was waiting for us when we got home. Enclosed was an inventory of Ormeda's belongings, listed under three headings. Dreama and Helen's inventory surely had helped with this.

- Item 1: Items left to Ormeda Moore Marks from the estate of her father.
- Item 2: Personal Property from Ormeda's marriage to her dad.
- Item 3: Personal property attained after the death of her father.

The spinning wheel, reeler and rope bed were the items Jack did not want sold at auction. He believed these were obtained when his dad and mom bought the house and they went with the house.

Jack made a quick change. He wrote Betty and said to sell everything, except the saw mill, stoves and ceiling light fixtures. Those that wanted to buy, could. There would be nothing "to decay and rot" as she had said. Betty had paid, in work, worry and money.

I watched Jack unpack his suitcases. I wanted to cry. For three years he had kept them packed, ready to go if his mother should call and ask for him or needed him. At last he was accepting she did not want him to care for her. She did not want him to have Power of Attorney or administer her will. She did not accept him as a first-born who did his best and was honest with her. In her dying days, she had rejected him. It was the end of hope for Jack. Piece by piece, he put each article from the suitcase into the closet and drawers. He had never been ask to come back and he knew now he never could. Three years he hoped and waited. It was over, forever. He knew.

Jack went deer hunting without me. Peggy being moved into a retirement home, Iris accusing me of stealing pictures, Ormeda's death, my fall on the sidewalk, the trip to Seattle to return the grandchildren and Jack's diagnosis of sugar diabetes, all in three months, was about all I could handle. Jack was cooperating with the handling of the estate. I was glad. Max wasn't.

## Chapter 70

# Another End

The auction to close my brother and Peggy's estate was tomorrow, Saturday, April 3rd. Another end, the end of my brother's life and achievements on earth, except for his children and grandchildren. I wanted to go. I called Iris to see if she would meet me there. There was one problem. I did not have the pictures to give to her.

She could not go. Howard should not be in the cold after surgery on his saliva glands. As soon as he was able, they would go to visit his brother.

Jack and I walked down the driveway of my brother's home. There, leaning against a tree to be auctioned off was a large charcoal painting of my great-grandfather Hersman .

"Jack, look. That's my great-grandfather. I'm buying that., I don't care the cost. No one's buying a picture of my great-grandfather at an auction. How awful that would be."

The day was cold and it was an outside auction. Attendance was poor. What should have been sold for dollars was sold for pennies. The auctioneers soon knew I was a member of the family and bid high for anything I wanted. I bought a table which matched one I inherited from Aunt Molly. I bought the picture for thirty dollars. I bought a camel saddle my brother Ray had brought Ed from Egypt. When I saw how cheaply articles that cost hundreds of dollars were sold, I decided to stop all impulse buying. I found a place for my purchases in my already over- crowded home. Maybe someday, my boys would appreciate them as I had.

The pictures were ready. Iris answered the phone.

"You just keep them, Lenore. I don't know why it was so important to me."

This after I paid fifty dollars to have copies made.

"Maybe because they were gone and you didn't know who took them."

"I don't think Peggy and her children took them."

"I know I didn't take them. I don't know how I got them," and I didn't.

We decided after Howard's seventy-fifth birthday would be a good time to bring the albums for her to choose what she wanted. I had to do it.

## Chapter 71

### Side Effects

Jack's diagnosis of diabetes was unexpected. With weight loss and one insulin pill a day, in two weeks his sugar count had decreased from 348 to 183.

Jack and I enrolled at St. Alexis Hospital for classes three days, two hours each day. First fact, there's no cure, only control. This was the only disease the patient had more control over than the doctor. It was up to Jack and I. Either because of heredity, age, stress, injury or a combination of these things, his pancreas had stopped producing insulin. Jack told the instructor, "My mother passed away. My sister put this stress on me." I was glad I had escaped the blame.

A dietitian explained Jack's choice of food, to total 1,700 calories a day, no sugar, little salt and measured quantities.

Jack went shopping for new foods and seasonings. Skimmed milk, which Jack said you gave to the pigs back home, shredded turkey to mix with ground sirloin, lite salt, margarine, bread and drinks, and lots of fruits and vegetables.

Jack bought one hundred twenty-five dollars worth of groceries.

"Did you think you were going to starve?" I teased him as he carried in bag after bag.

For the first time in his life, he was walking a block to the mail box to mail letters.

I could see Jack's frustration with the new progressive type glasses. "For the first time, I appreciate people that wear glasses. I'm getting like Mom."

His blue eyes looked different with the glasses. He was forever losing them.

Jack and I received a certificate for attending and completing the course about diabetes. Now it was up to us to apply what we learned.

I did not mention to Jack my problem again with my knee. He had enough problems of his own. I remembered the pain my mother had with her legs when she had cancer. It was sixteen years since my diagnosis of cancer and surgery.

The pain killers helped. I put a pillow between my knees at night. Rest helped. When I talked to Dr. Parker, he said, "Medicate with Ansaïd for ten days, and we'll go from there."

I was afraid of the side effects, one of which was ulcers.

Everything that went wrong, I would say, “I’m going to put that in my obituary.” I told Bob I wanted in my obituary I had taught in three states, West Virginia, Marileeland, and Ohio. I wanted to recognize West Virginia for my education and my first career opportunity..

When my neighbor, Molly, went to Pennsylvania and had a mild heart attack, I could not help her. She had a bad leg and understood. We both were on Ansaid, and were both having the same side-effects.

## Chapter 72

# Challenges

Jack was considering buying the farm. The Court House of Gilmer County, West Virginia sent him the appraisal of Ormeda's estate he had requested. Two new facts surfaced. Appraisal was for twenty-five more acres than the deeds read. There were \$12,000 worth of royalties included in the appraisal, which Jack did not want to buy. This would change the amount of money offered.

A letter arrived from Betty dated April 7, 1993. It began: "Dear Jack, Max, Gene, and Jimmy's Kids". Why had she called them "kids"? They were adults. With a PhD she surely knew kids were baby goats. The word "girls" or "daughters" would have given them dignity and importance.

The letter continued: "Thank you for the overpayment from Jack and Gene. I sent mine to the bank with yours." She was patting Jack and Gene on the back but slapping Max in the face because he had not paid. "I sent mine to the bank with yours" seemed to show a desire to be included as part of the family.

Included with Betty's letter was a statement of the "condition of Mother's finances". In writing, she added, "To date, the estate has \$727.39 remaining in cash." In "Johns to be Paid", she included , "Executor Fee-undetermined (maximum = 5#340-."

There was a map of the farm, with her interpretations as to how value would be determined.

- "Meadowland is more valuable than hillsides.
- "Timber land is more valuable than bare hillsides.
- "Pasture hillsides are more valuable than cliffs.
- "Free gas has value. (high)
- "Houses have value.
- "The barn has value. (high)
- "All portions should have access to the road.

- “All portions should have some meadow.
- “Oil gas wells detract from surface land value.”

The use of a point system to dispose of personal property was suggested instead of having an auction.

“Ray, what do you think of the material we got from Betty?” I asked.

“She downed people, and then tried to cover up.” Ray’s answer was brief and right.

“That’s exactly what I saw. I wasn’t going to mention it.

Ray nodded his head as he wiped up the orange pop he spilled by the refrigerator.

“I saw three put-downs. One was about Bob.”

The death of Ormeda erased the desire to go to the farm. The dead rat in the house, mentioned in Betty’s letter, make it even less appealing. Now it was business, get the will probated, get it over. Betty had written, “try to help each other. If you have a preference for a certain portion, please say so. Maybe we can agree for a change.” Jack did not answer her request. I don’t think anyone else did.

Iris called. Howard had been in intensive care for four days and was just moved into a private room.

“No one can help me but God,” she said. “I know you would have come.”

“Yes.”

“I know Justine would come.”

“Yes.”

I could not make any commitments. I depended on Jack to drive me, and he was in no mood for that. I called Justine, just back from Florida.

I suggested Justine wait a few minutes before she called Iris. It would look like we were gossiping. When Jack heard this, all hell broke loose. He hit the wall with his fist. He broke the plastic pancake turner he was holding. He walked back and forth in the kitchen, saying he didn’t understand our way of thinking. I could hardly hear Justine’s voice on the phone, but she could hear Jack. She told me I should offer to help Iris, even if she refused.

“Jack, will you take me to see Howard?”

“I will take you. I will not go see Howard. I do not want to see Iris. If she wants to come to the car to see me, tell her I don’t want to see her now, or ever. I will not allow myself to be open for her to stomp on me ever again. Don’t lie, tell the truth.”

Jack drove me to the entrance of Akron General Hospital on a sunny Sunday morning to visit my brother-in-law and sister.

I went into the hospital alone, and found Howard and Iris on fourth floor.

I stood at the door and saw Iris holding Howard’s head and wiping his mouth. I waited. Iris looked up and saw me.

“Lenore.”

I walked in to where she sat. Howard was having stomach pains and the nurse had given him Maalox. At twelve o’clock dinner was served, and it was

thoughtful that Iris had ordered herself a dinner to eat with him. Howard swallowed a few bites, enough to meet the requirement to eat before taking a pill. When I didn't eat, Iris fixed me coffee and a sandwich.

They asked about Jack.

"Jack doesn't like hospitals." I lied. "He said he'd see you later."

I saw the hurt in Howard's eyes. "Hospitals don't bother me, do they you? Sometimes we have to overcome things." I knew he wanted to see Jack.

Howard was "upbeat", jovial and as always pleasant with a twinkle in his eye. The nurse complimented him for his attitude. He told me about carrying a bag of fertilizer from the patio to the garden, when he should have used a wheelbarrow. Now his heart was damaged and he could not have surgery or the balloon insert.

After an enjoyable hour visit, Iris walked down with me to the main entrance. At the door, we stopped.

"I'll walk to the car and say 'hi' to Jack." How could I tell my sister the truth, Jack had told me to keep her away?

I touched Iris's shoulder. "I don't think you'd better," and for some unknown reason, she understood.

"God will help you," Iris said, blinking her eyes to hold back tears. "He will help you through everything."

"Thank you, Iris." I knew, without God how could I have made it these last few years. The pictures and all that hurt was forgotten. All that mattered was Howard and our sisterly togetherness.

The feeling I had with Howard and Iris didn't last once I was in the car with Jack. All his held-in grudges against my sister and her husband erupted. "They never visit us, only his relatives. He never worked a day in his life and lived like a prince off of your sister. They hurt you, and no one should ever hurt you. They wait for a chance to slash you." I did not agree with Jack. Howard did work. They did visit us, not as often as his relatives though. They hurt me, but I may have been at fault. I loved Howard and Iris, and always would.

I let Jack get his emotions and thoughts out into the open. Then we drove to Elyria Memorial Hospital to visit Gene's wife, recovering from a hysterectomy. Jack went in, and it was plain that he avoided Howard and Iris, not the hospital.

"God will help you," the words stayed with me. Howard was now home, and I ask Jack if he would take me to see him.

Iris answered the phone. "Is there any time that is best for us to come?"

"No, come anytime."

I went through the pictures choosing what I thought would please Iris. I chose copies of some, and knew I was being selfish. I wanted the originals.

As Jack and I drove Route 77 South, I prayed. "God, let this be a time of healing," I knew Jack was struggling with his feelings and I knew what I'd been through.

Howard was in the front of his home spraying shrubs for spider ants. Jack, wearing yellow pants and shirt, and I walked over. Howard told us what he was doing and that Iris didn't think he should be doing it.

When I went into the house to be with Iris, I noticed how immaculate everything was, and how pretty Iris looked in blue jeans and blue shirt. We did not hug.

She held back the curtain. "Look what Howard is doing. I just let him do it. He even wants to drive the car."

"That's best. Just let him do what he wants to. The sun and air are good for him. I'll go get the pictures."

"Yes, let's get that over with. Howard said he never wanted to hear about those pictures again."

On the envelope I had put the pictures in, I had put a sticker and written, "Happy Mother's Day, Misty 9th 1993". I put a pudding cake in the kitchen and laid the pictures on the table.

"I wrote that on the envelope because we both have the same mother."

Iris shuffled through the pictures. "I thought you'd bring me a whole stack of them."

"I tried to please you," and I sincerely had, and be true to myself.

"Why did you bring me copies? The originals were mine. Our aunt gave me this picture and talked about how mean Mom was. Where's the original? It's mine. Where's the picture of Howard and the Packard boy?"

"I kept one of those and gave you one."

"Where's the picture of Cheryl Moss?"

"I don't have a picture of Cheryl Moss."

"Where's the picture of Helen Lee?"

"I don't have a picture of Helen Lee." I knew both Cheryl and Helen and I knew I did not have a picture of them.

"This is an insult. I took all those pictures of your wedding day. Where are they? You're an asshole." I had never heard Iris talk like this and I was shocked and hurt.

"I tried to please you," and I walked toward the door near the patio. "We'd better go."

Iris grabbed my arm. "You're an asshole if you go now." She left her fingerprints on my arm as she had done when we were girls.

Outside, I said to Jack. "We need to go." Jack got my message quick. Poor Howard knew something had happened. I did not want to hurt him and I saw how much I had upset Iris.

I walked to the car. She followed and slammed the car door. She cupped her hands around her mouth and said something, but I could not hear. Jack backed the car out of the driveway.

At the garage door, Iris turned her "butt" toward me and flipped her thumb in her thigh as if to say, "Kiss my ass".

We drove away. I began crying. I had never had my neck spasm before. I cried and talked.

"My intentions were good, but not good enough. I was selfish when I kept the originals. I kept it a secret from you, but she accused me of taking those pictures from her. I've got to "butt" out. I've got to end my relationship with

my sister. I had not lived up to her expectations, and I must never try again. It's too painful for all of us."

Iris had called, but Ray and Jack did not tell me. Ray said she was crying and babbling, and he could not understand her, but he knew there had been a quarrel. He thought Howard had hung up the phone to stop her.

I looked at myself in the mirror. I'd been told many times I looked like my mother. I was older now than she was at her death. Her hair was never as gray as mine. She never had dark circles under her eyes like mine. I decided I would mail Iris the originals. When I went to get them, I could not find them. I searched through eight photo albums I kept on a chest at the foot of the bed. I turned each page. I found the picture of the Packard boy I kept, but could not find the others. I looked through drawers, behind furniture, everywhere I thought they might be. I could not find them. I could not sleep. Each morning, I began the search again. Jack helped me. The originals were gone.

I went into the living room. Jack switched channels on TV.

"I know you switch channels when I come in because there's a pretty girl on the screen."

"You act just like Iris."

"You act like Ormeda and Betty."

"That's a low blow."

"You did it first," and I went into the kitchen to fry bacon for Ray's lunch. Jack followed.

Jack grabbed my arm and twisted me around. My instinct was to throw hot bacon grease in his face. Instead, I took the lid and held it toward him.

"You leave me alone," and I meant it.

He handed me a big butcher knife. "Here, stab me, right here," and he pointed to his chest. "Come on, stab me. Chicken."

I leaned over the sink and began washing dishes. "I'm not going to be a murderer. You are the murderer," meaning there was more ways to murder a person than using a knife.

Jack left in the car. Ray had heard what had happened and came downstairs. I cried on his shoulder. "Life has been hell for me since I retired. I can't take much more. You can't take sides, though. I'm your mother and he's your father."

Jack returned, and Ray went upstairs.

"Molly called and gave you information about Merrill Lynch."

"Fuck Molly."

"You fuck Molly." This was an awful thing to say about such a fine person. I was trying to keep even with Jack, and often repeated his language to let him know how it sounded.

Jack went to bed. I looked for pictures. Very late I went to bed and thanked God for the control he had given me when Jack thrust the knife toward me and challenged me.

## Chapter 73

# Jack Rebels

I was tired. I had not slept at all. The beautiful day did little to awaken my mentally exhausted mind. Jack and I walked around each other, eating breakfast, reading the paper, dressing. Gene called and wanted Jack to go fishing. I decided not to go, even though I knew Eula might like company while she was recuperating.

I sat in my usual place, the green chair in the living room. Jack came in.

“How do we stand?”

“I don’t want to talk about it right now.” Not now.

“If I can’t have you, I’m not taking these pills,” and he threw three pills into the wastebasket. I remembered when we were young, and quarreled, he’d threaten to burn his clothes or shoot himself. I knew this behavior so well.

“Don’t do that to yourself.”

“I’m not taking any more pills. I’ll eat at Burger King.”

Jack left. He didn’t say good-bye and I didn’t wave out the window as I usually did. I went upstairs to clean Ray’s room. It was Mother’s Day, Misty 9, 1993, and wasn’t that what a mother was suppose to do? Bob and Monika had sent me a package and Ray would take me out to eat.

Jack returned from fishing with no fish. He did not answer when I asked about Eula, but he often did this if he weren’t wearing his hearing aids.

Jack ate a cookie and went to bed

If Mother’s Day was bad, the day after was even worse. Jack ranted and raved, slammed and bammed, and used bad language over and over. He knew this annoyed me. He would not take the prescribed medicine and delighted in showing me he was eating foods with sugar. He spent the early morning hours telling me all the bad things about our marriage, my jealousy, my family had no respect for him and to them he was a second-rate citizen, I’d only told him about three times in our marriage I loved him, I never enjoyed sex, I worked for the boys but never worked with him and on and on. When he finished, with eyes filled with tears, I said, “I hope you can find something about me you like.”

I became worried. “Should I call the doctor and report what Jack was doing. Should I call the police?” Instead, I went shopping for groceries.

I was putting the groceries away and yanked on the refrigerator door. The ceramic canister on top of the refrigerator fell and hit me in the head. I was hurt. I cried. I was not bleeding, a bruise. Sugar and pieces of the canister were all over the kitchen. I picked up pieces and Jack vacuumed. I mopped. Jack cursed the repairman who had installed the drawer. He threatened a law suit. They'd send someone out Wednesday.

.It was time for Jack's pill. I did not watch the afternoon soaps because Jack told me I couldn't.

"Take your pill, please."

"It's been two days since I've taken any pills. In another day, I'll be gone." He held his chest.

"Don't do this to yourself. I'll tell you one thing, if anything happens to you, I won't feel guilty. I was so proud of you. You always told me suicide was the unforgivable sin."

"This wouldn't be suicide. I just didn't take the pills."

I brought in a pill and pushed it between his teeth and put a glass of water to his mouth.

"If you tell me you love me, I'll take it."

"I love you."

"There's two more I should take," and he swallowed them, too.

Ray came home from work. "How's dad?"

"He took the pills." Jack knew how to communicate with his dad. He asked his dad to fix him hamburgers, so we ate hamburgers and salad.

That night Jack sat on the bed beside me. "Tell me you love me and I'll tell you something bad I did today." What else, I thought.

"I love you."

"When I was looking for Iris's pictures, I found the letter you had marked, 'Open on my Death'. I thought, what the heck, I'm going to read it. I'll tell you one thing. You were wrong. You should have turned his ass in."

I knew this secret had been a thorn for Jack for years. He was resentful, often saying I broke our marriage vows by keeping a secret. The secret had been sealed in the envelope in the top drawer of the chest for fourteen years. I had promised, with others, under pressure, I would never tell as long as I lived. I kept that promise until now.

The secret dated back to Cleveland State University when I was working on my Master's Degree. The young professor reminded me of Bob and I "was caught up" in the new learning about support groups, risk, trust, open-mindedness and working in groups of twos and threes. I was taken in by the learning process until we had classes one week end in a Cleveland Park.

The class was sitting around a campfire and was to move to a church for a candle-light service.

Half of the class was at the church but the other half were by the campfire with the professor. We waited, wondering where they were. One of the students came up and told the half by the church they were smoking pot, marihuana.

We were teachers at a church waiting for the professor and half the class were smoking marihuana. I felt deceived. These were teachers of children smoking

marihuana. I let it be known how terrible I thought it was. At first, part of the class saw it as I did.

We spent the night at the park. I did not sleep. I sobbed silently so others could not hear. If I could have found a way home, I'd have gone. I knew the professor was worried. I knew he had even a worse night. "This is terrible, the worst thing I've ever heard of. We are teachers of little children and you're doing that."

The next morning, the class sat in a large circle for a support group meeting. Brainstorming began. At first, a few of my friends and teachers from the school where I taught, thought as I did. As it became evident their grade and possibly getting their degree depended on this, they weakened. I saw them cave in to the other side.

I stood alone. "Teachers of children," I said hysterically. "Do you realize what this means?"

I knew I had power so powerful it was scary. The professor was scared, and knew if this got into the newspapers not only his career would be finished, but the students that were with him.

I felt group pressure. I thought of my degree. It was against my moral beliefs and degraded the teaching profession. It was when I thought of Bob, my son, a professor, that I began to weaken. If anything happened that endangered his profession, I would want someone to give him a second chance.

Before the support group meeting ended, the professor guided us into making a covenant that none of us would ever tell. I was nervous and upset. I couldn't tell Jack. I couldn't trust what he might do. I never told anyone, which increased their curiosity. Jack knew now, but had deceived me in opening the envelope. The professor said it was recreational smoking and he would never do this again. Jack said he would not tell. I was glad the professor was in California.

## Chapter 74

# Bob Makes an Offer

After having a case of the “shakes”, Jack returned to his sugar diabetes routine. I thought he could handle the letter from Bob, but asked Ray to be near. The letter was to all of the heirs of Ormeda’s estate, and should be approved by his dad.

“Greetings! I write at the request of and on behalf of my father, who has been advised to distance himself from situations that cause tension. He was recently diagnosed with the type of diabetes caused, in part, by being in situations that cause emotional stress. As you know, dealing in matters about the farm and Grandma’s estate cause Dad emotional stress.

“My letter is about Grand dad and Grandma’s farm in West Virginia. Mom and Dad would like to buy it from the heirs. If an agreement can’t be reached among the heirs, we propose that the farm be placed into a forced sale and sold “at the Court House”. Please take time to digest the contents of this letter. Also, please check the facts before coming to any conclusions. I’ve tried to cover all of the bases and anticipate all the questions. If I missed something, please let me know.

“Before talking about the specifics of selling the farm, I want to share with you some information you may or may not be familiar with. Some supporting documents are numbered and attached. I’ve tried my best to include authoritative documentation. If you would like further proof or documentation, please let me know and I will to my best to supply it.”

I read the three page letter with pride. Bob had done an excellent and professional job. Bob explained the appraisal was high for tax purposes, there was a twenty-five acre difference in the appraisal and deed, and quoted comparable acre values in that locality.

“Dad has agreed to purchase the farm for \$93,000- cash”, Bob offered, and proposed a deadline date of August 3, 1993. A letter would follow “that covers the items talked about. I hope it’s a plan you like, or at least support.” No belittling, no threats, no put-downs. Bob and his dad would both sign it. It would be a long two months, deadline on my birthday.

Saturday morning Jack called Lorna about the cement floor that was to be

poured at the church pavilion. The contractors did not want the job, so members of the church congregation had agreed to do it. The news that shocked Jack was that an oil and gas tycoon was inquiring about the farm and wanted to buy it for a golf course. Our little monies could never match his.

Jack called Bob and told him to get the letters in the mail as soon as possible. He would mail Bob a form giving permission to use his name.

Jack walked the floor. He held his chest.

“Jack, don’t let what happened to Ed happen to you.” I did not want him to worry over this estate like my brother had Aunt Molly’s.

“I can’t help it. It won’t stop. This old heart of mine won’t take it much longer. Mom started all this. Now she can lay in her grave and watch them play golf. Two hundred thousand is nothing to him and the family will want the money.”

“When the letter goes out, he will know what to bid.”

“I can’t go any higher than a hundred thousand.”

Jack went to the wood shop. I vacuumed. Bob was asleep in Seattle. When he awoke, the news was waiting for him.

## Chapter 75

# Cemeteries

The mailman delivered a brown paper bag with a pattern drawn on it and some pictures. I remembered, Justine had asked our cousin for them. I thought about pictures in my life the past year, pictures Jack had taken from the piano, the picture of my great-grandfather at the auction, the originals I had not given Iris, and now pictures Justine had asked for were mailed to me. I asked my friend, and she said I should give them to Justine. I hoped Justine got some in the mail, too. I wrote my cousin a thank-you letter.

Justine and Junior could not go with us this year to visit the cemeteries. Jack and I would go alone. First, we stopped at my mother's grave at Bunner's Ridge. No one had been there. We removed last year's memorial florals, cleaned the grave, and put on the new arrangements I had bought for my grandparents, Mom, and Uncle Herschel. Then we drove to the cemetery where Ormeda was buried five months ago. The grave was sunken. Metal baskets with dried flowers and faded ribbons covered the sunken hole. Green grass of early spring had grown around the edges of the sunken grave. I began carrying basket after basket to the side of the cemetery and put them in a large heap. Jack went to the car and got a shovel. He dug down the sides of dirt and filled in the sunken grave, the best he could. I clipped grass and placed an arrangement of flowers at the head of the grave between small metal markers that identified Jack's mother and father's graves.

There was no tombstone. Jack looked around the cemetery and decided a tombstone compatible to those nearby would be a good choice. I cleaned our little girl's grave and left a mauve bouquet. Then I cleaned Junior's grave, and put flowers in a vase that was a part of his document.

I looked across the meadow to the deserted farm house. The grass was high, ready to be cut. The grass around the house had not been mowed, and was just as high. Betty had offered the hay to Helen's husband for \$400- a cutting. He thought this was too much.

Basil could not understand why he had been by-passed and not asked to cut it, as he had been doing all the time Ormeda was alive. He said he couldn't keep cows without winter feed.

The last cemetery we visited was my father's. The rose Justine and Junior had planted draped over the left side of the tombstone. We put an arrangement that matched the rose near his grave and decorated my grandparents and great-grand dad's grave, the one in the picture I had bought at the auction.

It was a two-day trip. We stayed overnight at a motel and the trip cost one hundred sixty dollars, which included the cost of the memorial florals. As we neared home, we stopped at my brother Ed's grave. No one had been there, only the American flag waving in the breeze and a veteran marker near the modest head stone. I had nothing left to put on his grave. Hopefully, someone would remember him.

## Chapter 76

# Turtles to Seattle

At the airport in Pittsburgh, Marilee ran toward me. She was six, her first visit with Jack and I. Into my arms she sprang, then into Jack's. Her dad would be picked up the next day after attending a conference in New York.

From Pittsburgh to Garfield Heights, to the cabin. Five of us, with luggage, rode in the Town Car pulling the trailer with the four-wheeler. Ray was with us, using a week of vacation time. We rode past Ormeda's empty farm house, grass knee high, up the narrow dirt road to the cabin.

As we came nearer and nearer the cabin, I did not know what to expect. After seeing Ormeda's home, I was ready for anything. What I saw was neatly cut grass around the cabin. Inside was neat and clean, Paul Marks, Jack's cousin, had been there and left everything ready for us. It was a pleasure to set up housekeeping.

Marilee declared the upper bunk of her dad's old bunk bed when he was a boy her territory. Quickly, we made the bed and she ran for a ride on the four-wheeler. She rode with Uncle Ray, Grand dad and when her dad learned how to ride, rode with him. Her golden, glistening curls swayed. Her eyes beamed with joy. That night around a campfire, we roasted hot dogs and marshmallows.

We thought no one knew we were there, but there was a white car coming up the dusty road. Behind the car was a white farm tractor. It was Justine, Junior and Mac, and Basil behind them. Jack hurried and put extra steaks on the grill.

After we ate, around a campfire, at an isolated cabin in the hills, eight people ate watermelon and sang "Happy Birthday" to Jack on his sixty-sixth birthday. Bob put a marshmallow on a stick and said, "Happy birthday, Dad. This is your candle. Blow it out." We had a "sugar diabetes" birthday and served strawberry shortcake and watermelon for desert.

Justine, Junior and Mac stayed all night. That pleased Marilee.

The night, day, night stay at the cabin was all the time we had. Bob and Ray had such little time together, it was a pleasure to watch them taking turns mowing the grass, digging sand and rocks from the creek bed and hauling it to fill in the holes in the road, shooting at targets they hung in the trees and

playing Scrabble when it rained.

Justine and Junior left for Howardton, we left for Garfield Heights and a letter from Betty.

I started reading the letter aloud. "Stop reading, I can't take anymore," Jack screamed. His sugar had "kicked in" and his heart was "playing tricks". He went to bed.

Betty's letter was timed for Jack's birthday, post-marked June 4th, his birthday was June 8th. I erased this ugly thought and thought about the card from Lorna that described Jack so well with all he had been through.

"Happy birthday to a Guy...

with an iron will  
nerves of steel  
and a heart of gold.

in other words, one of our most valuable resources."

She wrote, "Maybe you should sell stock in your resources. Sounds like a quick get rich scheme. Have a great one, Love you, Lorna."

The card described Jack and I knew what was ahead would require "an iron will" and "nerves of steel".

Bob and Marilee packed for the trip back to Seattle. Marilee had a box of five turtles she had found at the cabin. They were hers and she would get to name them. No questions were asked as the turtles passed through the scanner at the airport. We said good-bye to Bob, to a happy Marilee, and five box turtles.

Bob took Betty's letter with him. Ray had seen marihuana growing near Betty's cabin. He told Bob, and Bob told his dad and I.

Betty's letter was an answer to Bob's proposal to buy the farm for ninety-three thousand. She did not want to sell her part of the farm, but favored a trust. As always Betty wrote sickening propaganda to influence others, "not to let money blind their decisions" and told about all the beautiful memories on the farm, and to have "a place to come home to". She usually came home once a year and anyone could recognize what she was trying to do. It was definitely a letter against Jack buying the farm.

This was the first refusal, so there was no need to wait for answers from the others. Bob decided to call the others. Max wanted more money, at least one hundred twenty thousand. He talked about the timber, the one area Bob had not checked out.

Max called Jack. He said Jack was dumb and didn't know anything about farming. Jack hung up. He did not think Max had the right to say who would cut the hay. He did not have this right.

Jack called Helen. "I don't want to hurt you. You were too good to my mommy. I don't want Max speaking for me about my part of the farm. I hope you understand.."

## Chapter 77

# A Contract Not Honored

Jack was determined to have a monument at his father and mother's grave. Each heir received a letter dated June 14, 1993 saying he had priced a monument at Jones Monument in Westlake for \$1500- plus tax. "This is a family decision, and I would like your input. Mom made no arrangements in her last will, so we'll have to pick up the cost."

Jack, tired from mowing the yard, was asleep in his recliner. I was watching, "One Life to Live". I took the privilege of opening a letter that came from Betty that came in the mail. It was an answer to Jack's letter about the monument.

"Dear Jack,

"Oh, it is good to hear from you. I didn't like the news about mother's grave. Gene, Eula, Debbie, Paul and I were present when the undertaker agreed to the conditions in the attached letter. "Where were we Betty? Why weren't we included? I read on, "I'd like you to hand carry it to him and watch him read it.

"I like the idea of the stone for mother and dad. Gene mentioned it once to me but I think I was grieving so much I couldn't think about it then. Thanks for going ahead, and I'll pay my share.

"I've talked more to Bob in the past few months than I have in years. What a man he has become! You must be ready to burst with pride. You guys surely did something right. I've always bonded with him and loved him, but while I'm in awe at his intelligence and skill, I am most struck by his decency as a mature man."

I cried, not because of what Betty had written about Bob, but because she recognized and admitted it to Jack.

Jack awoke, and I handed the letter to him.

The letter continued, "Business is okay, not great, but okay. Since doctors said I was working too hard, I scaled down and am moving into a smaller space to reduce overhead. Since then I've gained some weight (115 lbs.) and don't look as close to death as I did. Now I have to get new clothes. I'm working on getting to 130.

"Bob says you've developed diabetes. Darn. And of course reduce your

stress...boy. That's hard to do. But maybe I can help you do that. I don't want to fight with you. I need your help. Let's relax and help each other."

The letter ended with early -history propaganda which was characteristic of Betty in an effort to be included.

"My heart breaks over the bickering and fighting, because I'm fighting with part of myself. We've all lost the bond that held us together when we lost mother. Now, we have to do it ourselves. Call me, talk to me. I need you. We're adults who care about each other, more than any of us care to admit. Together we're a formidable clan, separation weakens us. I've always been bossy, but I'm trying to quit. But you are bossy, too. Gene's the least offensive of all of us. Let's elect him to be boss. I love you, Sis."

Did Ormeda hold them together? Had she and Betty created the conditions that had blown the family apart? Separation weakens, but when the family got together for a meeting, it was blown in bits. Did I see her mellowing?

In Betty's letter was an enclosure to the mortuary stating the agreement for Ormeda's funeral had not been honored. Jack, who resented being told to do it, was to hand this to the owner of the funeral home. In part,

"During the arrangements for mother's funeral, you stated that you would follow up in leaving the grave site in good shape. You said you would make two follow-up visits, one in a few months, and one in six weeks. The six-week follow-up was to remove debris and baskets, and the later follow-up was to mound the grave site."

Jack and I did not know our Memorial Day visits , followed by a letter to relatives about the condition of the grave and a need for a tombstone, would reveal to us the people that made the funeral arrangements and that the mortuary had not lived up to their agreement.

"I thoroughly expect you to make restitution to the bearer of this letter as my agent. We expect immediate cooperation," and Jack was designated bearer.

About three hours after dinner Jack drank a can of pop and got the "shakes". He was resting when Gene called.

"Eula and I have been to the cabin. I had the farm cruised for estimates of the worth of the timber. It is worth at least \$150,000, minus a \$15,000-commission for handling and removing the trees. Oil right-of-ways will make the job easier."

How did this make Jack look offering ninety-three thousand for the farm? It was the one thing he had not checked out. Did the family think he was trying to cheat them?

We were the only ones that knew this besides Gene and Eula. How should this new information be handled.? We outlined procedures.

1. Did Gene have authority to get the heirs to approve timbering while Betty was executrix for Ormeda's will?
2. Would all eight heirs agree?
3. Gene would acquire Power of Attorney for the timbering.

He was happy to call Gene and tell him it was a good deal. Gene misunderstood. Didn't Jack trust him? Jack was being too "pushy". Jack wouldn't talk to Gene and said his family "was all screwed up".

Jack was monitoring blood-sugar levels often. On our forty-fourth wedding anniversary we went out for dinner. He handed me a letter, written to Gene.

"You have called me greedy and made fun of my Christian beliefs, and have said I wouldn't let anyone live it down if I did something for them. All of this I have looked over and tried to be a friend as well as a brother to you.

"Now you say I'm "pushy". You really did it with the phone call about the follow-up price the cruise person quoted. You buy a car, rug, TV, you shop or at least check the price. These are a penance of the amount involved in the timber purchase. My call to you was to verify the price your source offered and was a good price. My source complimented us.

"My word to you was that I would keep your work and price of the timber confidential. I will not break that word. I plan to petition the Court of Gilmer County to settle the estate. I will bid only the amount offered in my proposal to purchase. If the bid goes over one hundred thousand, I won't run it up. If you wish to purchase it, you will have to do it without me. I have a brother in Florida and a sister in Colorado that may join you.

"One way you can get my permission to timber the farm is to show me a right-of-way signed by all the heirs.

"Don't try to contact me unless you have the right-of-way. I never want to see any of you again, first Max, then Betty and now you. Goodbye, Jack"

I was sorry for Jack. I did not know what to do. I knew the hurt was deep. Maybe, just maybe, the letter would never get to Gene.

## Chapter 78

# Let Us Pray

A letter arrived from Lorna, with a copy of the poem, "I'm Free" that was read at Ormeda's funeral. She also enclosed a picture of her mother, Aunt Vi. The meadows had been cut, Rebecca moved out of the "schoolhouse" and bought a home in Westlake with trust money, and Basil was not well.

Jack's letter to Helen's husband giving him permission to cut the hay must have arrived just in time. In the letter, Jack defined exactly what he wanted and expected.

"Cattle will be removed from the meadows by the second week in March, 1994.

"Reasonable care will be taken to keep the cows off the cabin property.

"No permission to use barn or equipment.

"Hold monies until someone is designated to receive the money."

Jack gave permission to pasture his, and his only, cattle on the meadows after the second cutting, and earlier if there were no second cutting.

The next morning, Jack crumpled the letter he'd written Gene. Only I knew its contents.

Bob thought now was the time to mail his letter to all the heirs. He began, "Greetings", and said phone bills were over a hundred dollars but "I'm making Dad pay the bills". This would finalize Bob's participation in the offer for his dad to buy the farm.

He wrote, "Here are the options as I see them. If you have others, please let everyone know.

1. "Sale can be forced by any one of the heirs. This remains, as far as I know, the only manner of resolution that can occur if all the heirs can't agree.
2. "Kathy favors dividing the farm into fifths and having the heirs draw plots from a hat.
3. "There is Betty's proposal for a corporation or trust. I was a strong supporter of this. I wonder, though, if we're having this much of a challenge now talking

to each other, how we could be in a corporate-trust meeting.”

Bob postponed the July 7th date for petition to sell. This would give Gene time to get his act together about the timber, the newly discovered aspect of settling the estate. “In Betty’s recent letter to the heirs, she said she would not sell. Since I found similar sentiment in my other conversations and since all would have to agree to sell, the purchase offer is moot and a follow-up is not needed.

“That’s all I have for now. Let us pray. Bob.”

God bless Bob. Another job well done. Communications were left open. The date of petition was delayed, and for now, his job was complete.

Jack had not mailed the letter to his brother, and inside he was ravaging mad, but when it came to Gene, he had a soft, forgiving heart. He’d do anything to keep Gene’s favor, so when he called him on Independence Day it was no surprise.

“Hello, Little Brother,” Jack said, trying to break the ice that existed between them. I hated this “Little Brother” stuff, I thought it made Gene look lesser.

“Hello, Old Fart.” This was what Gene had called Jack when he talked to me, but I did not tell Jack. I thought it was terrible and an insult.

At this time in Jack’s life, this was his normal procedure, act tough but finally to be soft and let others manipulate him. I got so tired of it, but it was his family, not mine.

After breaking the ice by talking about fishing, he led into the real issue. “I got down to earth and off my high horse. Ray told me you were allowed to flare up once in your lifetime. Bob and Lenore told me there was more good between us than bad. “ Jack had opened communication again with Gene and Gene was ready to go on.

“Betty and Debbie reneged on the sale of the timber. Kathy is going to persuade Debbie. Max is preparing forms to be mailed. If all can’t agree on the sale of the timber, I’ll put the farm up for bid and get as much money as I can.”

I had heard Ormeda, Betty, and Jack use threats but this was the first time I heard Gene. The new problem was how much money was the farm with the timber worth. If the timber people came in and bid against each other, no one knew how high it could go.

The forms to be signed from Max were dated July 3, 1993. Each form covered a different subject. There were four forms, one about pasturing livestock on the farm, one about using the farm as a hunting area and charging each hunter \$250-, one about cutting the hay and lastly, one about the timber. On each form he concluded, “I understand that failure to forward to Party indicated on enclosed envelope within twenty-five calendar days of the above date it will be recorded as a YES vote.” The Party indicated on the enclosed envelope was Gene.

Jack met with Gene and Eula about procedures for the farm and timber. He wanted to call Betty.

“Don’t stand in my way. I’ll only talk about the monument.”

“What if you get Paul?”

“I’ll ask for Betty.”

He got the answering machine. This was his first attempt to talk to Betty since he was kicked out of the farm house six months ago. He left his phone number. Would she call? No.

Jack called Aunt Vi, surprised she was home from the hospital.

“I just crumpled. They haven’t ruled out a mini stroke. My arm is bruised, and they said it might be harder to heal than a break. Thank you for the call.”

Another day passed, and another and another would pass and hopefully the day when the mess created by Ormeda’s estate and four uncooperative, undecided, self willed children would compromise and consider others to arrive at a cumulative decision. The mess and stress continued, hidden in cracks and crevices of their minds as they artificially went about their daily routines.

Jack glanced a glare at me and dialed Betty at her office. He talked about the monument and delivering the letter to the mortuary. She told the owner “to make it right”. She honored Jack’s request not to talk about the farm.

Jack had his family to deal with, and I had mine. The damage and loss of Iris’s friendship was ever present and Ed’s home with new owners, was hard to accept. Ray, now twenty-nine, and Bob became more and more a blessing. Time spent with Justine and Junior helped time pass and eased the pain. “Let us pray,” helped, too.

## Chapter 79

# Debbie

The day had been a special day with teacher friends in the heart of Amish Country shopping and eating. We played pinochle at home. Late at night, Jack looked at a letter from Debbie. His blood-sugar reading zoomed to 223. It was a two page letter, dated July 12, 1993.

“To Whom It Misty Concern”

“I received the letter and ballots from Max on Thursday, after which I phoned Aunt Betty and Max to discuss some of the many concerns with proposals which Max made. I thought I would let all of you know what I think of each and everyone of Max’s proposals.

“First and foremost we must all totally agree on everything. I don’t go for the “majority rule theory”. Be warned, if you so much as attempt to cut one of my trees without my permission, I promise that you will have trouble on your hands. I don’t mean to be rude. I really would like to work together, but at the same time, I refuse to allow you to run over me once again. I don’t have to do anything unless I want to. Therefore, do not ever tell me what to do, just try asking. In Max’s letter, it comments that Grandma is gone and we must carry on. I agree, but I hope this can be accomplished with some of the values and standards that she instilled in us.” She tried to instill, I wanted to say.

I summarized each of the Debbie’s answers to the ballots.

Ballot concerning leasing hunting rights—“I would not appreciate it if the farm became a slaughter ground.”

Ballot concerning pasturing the farm—“I feel this could only help the farm considering whoever pastures the property must build a fence. Pasturing would also aid in keeping the brush down. The prices Max has indicated are agreeable to me.”

Ballot concerning mowing the hay—“The way several meadows flood so often anyone who wishes to mow the meadows risks loosing a lot of the hay. Therefore, once again, for this proposal I feel that I must say no since a previous agreement already exists. However, the proposal does have possibilities for next year.

Ballot concerning the timber—“The answer, quite simply, is no as well. First of all, I have very little information about this. I am afraid if we timber the

land to a degree you have indicated, there won't be anything left. Also, it has been indicated to me that this may aid in helping us divide the property. I don't understand how. If Jack forces a sale, with the timber intact, I feel I can get several interested parties to bid on the property. You see, I feel not one of us is entitled to all the farm. I would rather a stranger have the farm than to see Jack take everything. He put Grandma through entirely too much those last years of her life. I do not intend to let all the torture she was forced to experience be for nothing. Now, if we could agree on the division of the land beforehand, we may be able to work together."

Debbie included a "rough draft" showing how she thought the farm could be divided five ways, and "even after it is divided we could implement some of Max's proposals." She concluded, "I hope you take in what I had to say and let me know your feelings. Debbie Allison."

Jack reacted with elevated blood-sugar and "don't talk about it."

I reacted, "Who caused Ormeda trouble in her last days?"

Bob reacted, "Let's petition for sale."

Ray said, "Any way it goes, we win."

## Chapter 80

# A Different Lawyer

Some of the ideas from Debbie about Max's four proposals were good, but not new. She make Jack the villain and took no responsibility at all for her own behavior and words. I agreed with Max to take the money and run. I was ready to fight for Jack, support his ideas and use our savings to do what we had to do and could do.

I was ironing in the basement and went over and over in my mind what Debbie had written. I could see Betty's influence shining through the letter. I went upstairs and wrote:

"Dear Debbie,

"I'm shaking inside as I write. I'm glad you concluded your letter, "Let me know your feelings." Thanks for the opportunity, that is, if I have to get the opportunity or permission from you.

"I'm outraged at the way you took permission to attack Jack about the treatment of his mother, and not only that, tried to put your ideas about Jack into the minds of other family members. To have talked or written to Jack privately would have been the proper procedure. Also, read your letter. You took absolutely no responsibility for your behavior and what happened. I call this a cop-out and trying to transfer blame and guilt.

"I've been married into this family for forty-four years. Isn't that longer than you are years old? Please be kinder if you consider any cooperation. Lenore."

It was rare I stood up for Jack but for three years she had tried to influence people against him. I showed Ray the letter. "Don't mail it," Ray advised. In the crumpled letter was my emotions and anger.

To show appreciation of the "extras" Dreama and Helen had done for Ormeda, I gave each a painting by Justine. Justine was a student with Mr. Jenkins and her work was superior to most. For Helen I chose a painting of two raccoons, because I liked the dark, sparkling eyes so much like her own. For Dreama, I chose a painting of a flower arrangement, because I knew her love of beauty. Dreama called to thank me. Debbie's snide re sank to the level she was when she wrote them.

Why had Debbie sent a letter at all to Jack since Max requested they be

sent to Gene? Gene got his ballots a few days after Jack, and Debbie said she might reconsider.

On July 27, 1993, Bob and Monika's nineteenth wedding anniversary, at one o'clock, Jack and I were in the office of Joe Haller, an Attorney-at-Law in Westlake, West Virginia. Jack decided me needed a different lawyer.

The entrance to Mr. Haller's office dated to the first part of the century, and volumes of law books were neatly displayed in glass-enclosed book shelves. We entered the office. Mr. Haller sat behind his desk. He rose, and shook hands. He was short, beginning to bald, and bright eyed. We felt comfortable as we talked about the house that housed his office. It had a lot of history and was situated on Main Street, without much frontage.

Up front, Jack wanted to know his fees. Eighty-five dollars an hour, one hundred when in court or litigation.

Jack and I soon realized petitioning an auction sale of the farm was involved, complicated and a long drawn out process of five to six months. The heirs living in the state would be notified by the sheriff at the cost of twenty dollars per person and simultaneously an Order of Publication in the local paper would be printed for out-of-state heirs. Personal property could be included in the petition.

Three men would be commissioned by the court to walk the farm and make a recommendation as to whether or not it could be divided. One of us should go with them, and point out reasons we thought it could not be.

After sides as to why or why not it could not be divided had been argued, the judge had the power to make the decision.

At any time during the negotiations, a compromise could be reached, and the petition to sell withdrawn.

Mr. Haller said the timber made dividing the property almost impossible and told us "to get in bed with the timber people". He said it could get "bloody", but he was willing to accept the case "since that's how he made his money".

Jack immediately organized a folder for Mr. Haller as soon as we got home. He gave Bob and Ray Limited Power of Attorney, had it notarized and sent Bob a copy. He had done so well with the interview with Mr. Haller, but he said every time he thought about the farm he had heart palpitations. I knew he'd be there for the boys, and do all he could to help when it came to the sale of the timber, the right-of-way to the cabin, sale of the farm and closing the estate.

Mr. Haller received the thirteen items Jack sent, including names and addresses of the defendants, deeds, appraisal, wills of his dad and mother, results of the timber cruise, letters from Betty and Debbie, Bob's offer to buy the farm for ninety-three thousand, and a tax statement for thirty-two and a half acres of gas and oil. Mr. Haller suggested we not go for the gas and oil, it would only cloud the issue". To me, the issue was not only cloudy, but muddy.

## Chapter 81

# Ugliness

Jack wrote letters of recommendations for Helen and Dreama for future employment. The letters were personalized. Both had been excellent in the care of Ormeda. Helen's letter stressed she was lovable, prompt, dependable and efficient. Dreama's letter stated she was stable, dependable, with high standards, excellent in communicating with patients and professionals. Jack hoped this would help them when they needed other employment.

Bob faxed a letter to his Dad's new Toshiba fax machine. The letter that would initiate the petition to sell the farm. Gene had told Bob, "do what is necessary to greatest advantage". The letter to Mr. Haller from Bob, dated August 1, 1993 included petitioning for the sale property owned by his grand dad and grandmother, personal property and right-of-way to the cabin.

Jack told his mother when she was alive it would come to this. I hadn't thought so.

The ugliness of the situation was partially it was my son, and Ormeda's oldest grandson that had done the petitioning. No one had answered the proposal to buy, except Betty, and that was a "no".

Jack said, "Do it, Bob."

Gene said if Bob didn't, he would. He, too, had been turned down by Betty and Debbie about the sale of timber.

Jack stood steadfast in his determination that this was the only way and the right way to proceed.

Today, August 3, 1993, I am sixty-eight years old, three years older than my mother was at her death. I think of my aches and pains, and them remember Mom's pain before she died, and it diminishes mine. I begin to appreciate the old people of my youth, who suffered, but never complained.

I think of the love and friendship, lunch with my neighbor, and the basket of flowers, a call and a plant with three carnations, one for Iris, one for me, and one for Justine, flowers from Ray, cards from Monika and the grandchildren and six volumes of books by Bodie Thoene, and a card from Alesia. I longed to hear from Iris. Two relationships were now on hold, my sister and Jack's sister, Betty. Tears of happiness and tears of hurt, mixed together, streamed

down my cheeks. Jack never knew. All I could hear was the buzz of a saw in the workshop. I was sixty- eight. Tonight I'd go to bingo.

After two days of silent grief, a birthday card arrived from Howard and Iris. She had carefully selected the card and included Howard in the message. It read, "For a Very Special Person" and ended, "And we're hoping you know that because it's your day, today's very special to us." I knew years of youth, growing up together, getting our education and jobs together could not die. It was signed, "Howard and Iris". How could I ease back into their lives? I heard the buzz of the lawn mower outside. Again Jack never knew the sobbing tears I shed. Tonight we would play cards with our teacher friends.

News that President Clinton's economic program passed the Senate 51-50 flashed across the screen. Senator Basil Kerrey, D, from Nebraska cast the tie, and Vice President Gore cast the tie- breaking vote. Many believed it was a political buy-out for the Democrats, Jack and I knew we would dig deep into our pockets for the next four years for tax money.

I wrote on a postcard, "Dear Howard and Iris, Thank you for the "Happy Birthday wishes For a Very Special Person". It was "my day" and I knew you'd think of me. It was one of my best birthdays. Thank you so much. Love always, Lenore."

Iris could interpret this as she chose. Whatever she thought would be fine with me.

Thoughts, words and faxes were seesawing from Seattle to Garfield Heights about the farm. Each week, we searched through the "Glenville Democrat" for notification about the auction. Jack was accumulating all the money he could for the time it was needed.

Jack carved a watermelon into the shape of a basket and filled it with fresh fruit to take to the church reunion. Jack knew the hundred people there, mostly his relatives. The pavilion had been completed with serving table and handrails and it was the ideal place for eating and visiting. I was disappointed when I overheard Jack tell others the farm was in the hands of the court.

Across from the church services and gospel music, the empty, lonely farm house with the now neatly cut lawn, was a reminder of what had been and what was to be. Helen and her sons cut the lawn because Ormeda always wanted it to look its best at reunion time. The congregation of the church also worked to make everything at its best, for the community but also for those returning to visit.

Gene's family went with us to the cabin after the reunion. Jack and Gene wanted to discuss the news sixty-nine acres of land was for sale adjoining the cabin property. It was for sale for forty thousand. The realtor said there was a good stand of timber and a right-of-way.. If this were true, there would be a right-of -way to the cabin without coming through Ormeda's property.

Jack and Gene contacted a timber cruiser. The realtor was checking on the right-of-way. He would not sell to another interested party until Monday, and by then we would have the answers about the timber and right-of-way would be into us.

Jack and Gene computed the acreage at ten thousand dollars, and the results

from the cruiser's report was fifteen thousand, so they offered the realtor twenty-five thousand. They had found no right-of-way and the timber was less than estimated. Sixty-nine more acres looked good, but would the realtor accept their offer?

## Chapter 82

### Civil Action 93-C 55

Jack told Helen's husband to hold the money for the hay until it was decided to whom it should be paid, but when Betty called, he mailed her a check for \$400-. This, to Jack, was a breach of contract, and Max and Gene were angry, too. They threatened to sue, but didn't.

I could not forget Max's words about his own brother. "How's Jack's heart, if he has a heart." I had never heard of such cruelty. We did not accept the invitation to go to a cook-out at the home of Max's son when they came up from Florida.

I ignored Max's slur. "He went to the doctor today. He's hooked up to a monitor for twenty- four hours. We can't come to the cook-out because Justine and Junior are coming to go to bingo with us tonight." Anyway, Gene and Eula would be there.

This was the first time Jack talked to Max since he refused to talk to him on the phone. Max wanted to see Bob and Ray's Power of Attorney and threatened he could have the petition dismissed.

"That was awful, Eula. Why did Max have to talk about Jack's heart that way? What made it worse was the way Jack was strung up to that monitor."

"I know. " Eula answered.

The next morning there was a knock at the door. Why did Max and Melba stop to see us after their visit with their son? Melba visited with Justine, and Max with Jack. Any discussion of the farm was avoided. Max, right now, wanted his money.

After five games of cards, Justine and I winning three of them, Justine and Junior left. They planned to visit Howard and Iris and stay overnight. They did not discuss me. Iris was doing all the driving and they were going to visit his brother.

I ask Justine, "Did Iris give you a cat door-stop?" She promised to make one for me and one for Monika.

"Yes, she gave me one and one for Karen." I knew Karen would like one because she loved cats.

Suddenly I knew I did not want the door-stop. Unless you are at peace with

the giver, you really do not want their gift. I thought of all the things Iris had given me. Our relationship was different and the feelings toward the gifts were different, too. I did not want to hurt her, but I knew I wanted nothing from her..

The cool September air was replacing the hot humid air of August and blew through the front door to where I sat in my green swivel chair with my feet on the ottoman. It was a special day here near Cleveland. Allergy season would soon be over for Ray. I thought of September 20th, Ormeda's birthday, that would soon be here and she would have been ninety. The, "Will Betty be there, then we won't go" decision did not have to be made. I missed Ormeda.

I thought of Gene and the emphatic, but gentlemanly way he made the decision Betty should not have gas rights to her cabin until she finished administering the estate. He called Helen and told her his was the first "no" vote. I felt sorry for Helen's son and his wife who were living in Betty's cabin and now must move because they couldn't afford bottled gas. He also said he voted "no" to their moving in the "schoolhouse."

When Betty cooperated with the family, they would cooperate with her. Betty was slow learning she was one of five.

The mail interrupted my tranquility. It was 4:30 on September 16th, and the partition dated September 14, 1993, arrived. Should I or should I not open the letter? It was addressed to Jack. Yes, I would open it and screen its contents, knowing Jack's health problems. I decided Jack could not handle the seven page document, a copy of the complaint instituted on his behalf and be reviewed and kept for his records. I would give it to Bob and Ray.

Civil Action NO. 93-C 55 now and forever, would be imprinted in our lives, Jack as the plaintiff, listed against his brothers and sister, and Junior's four daughters. This was my first, and probably the last, to see such a document.

The Complaint stated the contents of his father and mother's will. Ormeda's estate appraisal was in the Office of the Clerk of the County Commission of Gilmer County, West Virginia in Inventory Book 43, at Page 478 and his dad's was in Book 25, P. 179. Real estate surface was listed, three tracts as 313.23 acres but the "deeds vesting title refer to the acreage as 288.23 acres, more or less." This confirmed Bob's discrepancy of 25-acres when he made the \$93,000-offer. The tracts were described, boundaries given, 96.85 acres, 75.59 acres, and 115.82 acres.

Mr. Haller was asking for a right-of-way from the public road to the property of Jack and Gene's. The lack of this right-of-way in writing and deeds, was Jack's biggest concern. The sale was necessary because the "nature, character and amount of said real estate cannot be conveniently or equitable partitioned in kind or divided among the owners thereof."

I summarized the Plaintiff's, Jack's, demands.

1. Partition and distribution of proceeds be made.
2. Commissioners appointed to ascertain value.
3. Cost of this action be shared by all.

4. "That plaintiff be granted such further relief as the Court may deem just to the nature of this case may require."

5. The Complaint was signed by the lawyers, and their address given.

I had to show it to Jack. He immediately called Bob in Seattle and Ray at work. He was shaking and said I should not have shown the partition to him. I knew Betty would be upset when the lawyer wrote as Executrix she had not "pursued her trust as required by law." She hadn't. She was letting the boys do it.

Jack and his sons had done what they had to do. The defendants would be harsh in their response.

I reread Civil Action 93-C-55. Mr. Haller had presented it as an "action for the benefit of all the owners". I hoped others would see it that way, but knew they wouldn't.

## Chapter 83

# Mar ihuana

News travel fast from the hills. Max in Florida called Gene and Gene called us. Debbie's husband, Kurt, was in serious trouble for growing marihuana. Details were not known. Max confirmed what he heard when he called Helen, on pretext of finding out about paying Betty \$400- and to Debbie on pretense of calling about the timber. Debbie said they had seen lawyers in Parkersburg and Howardton.

The secret I kept from Ormeda and Betty at the meeting was out. The accusations came the day before Ormeda's ninth birthday, how ironic. Would Betty now understand Jack's other reason to want the checkbook out of Debbie's hands? Betty would never admit it.

After Gene confided in us, I told him there were rumors Dreama had marihuana and used a cave for packaging and distribution, and authorities could never catch her.

Gene said to me, "Now you can go cry." He could tell tears choked out my voice.

"I love those girls. I can't treat them like I use to."

When Jack heard about the marihuana, he said, "Mama, I'm glad you're dead. I'm glad you didn't have to go through this. I've been saying for years Kurt is a no-good nut. What do you think of Debbie's letter now?"

"You mean about the values Grandma instilled in her?" I questioned.

"Some values, I'd say," and Jack went to load the four-wheeler. Tomorrow, on Ormeda's birthday, Jack and I were going to the cabin for four days.

Jack read in the local paper to find out more news. None. From relatives he heard Kurt had over one hundred six-foot tall plants, each valued at one thousand dollars. One hundred plants and over meant one to five years in prison. Jack requested prayer at church for "the differences in our family and for Kurt and Debbie who are having their problems".

The minister said, "Yes, I believe I read something about that in the paper."

Since I did not give Basil a thank-you gift when I gave Dreama and Helen paintings from my sister, I gave Basil a large framed picture of Ormeda, on her birthday. I thought that appropriate since he was a nephew. He came to the

cabin to thank me.

“How would you like to come home from work and a helicopter and two state police cars be in your front yard and the policemen holding your two guard dogs?” This is how he described what happened to Kurt. Kurt plead guilty.

A helicopter flew over the cabin. I wondered if they were looking for marijuana.

I wanted to see Debbie’s new home after she moved out of the “schoolhouse”. To pacify me, Jack said he would take me. The gravel road turned off the main highway near where we sometimes stayed at a motel . We crossed over railroad tracks on top of a hill. I did not know what to expect. We passed an unkept mobile with junk all around it. We passed a dilapidated white house. We went on, and on a mailbox I read, “Kurt and Debbie Allison” .

“Jack, this is it. I hope they don’t recognize our car.”

Nestled on flat land, with the beautiful hills surrounding it, was a brown house with a porch the length of the front of it. One could not help but appreciate the neatness of the acre yard and four out-buildings about the size of a one-car garage. This was Debbie’s, so neat, located back “in the holler” with very poor roads, away from the main road.

Would this be confiscated? Did Jennifer and Misty know? Did they need help?

## Chapter 84

### Attacks

The October air was invigorating. The letter from Max stifled the ambitions the day had aroused. It was dated September 18, 1993, and a copy was sent to our lawyer. His letter was an explosion, difficult to understand. He painstakingly took the Complaint to sell the farm, inserting and deleting by line by line. Throughout he repeated the idea, "Plaintiffs action is entirely self serving", and "Equitable in the eyes of the plaintiff is all for me and to hell with the others." This was an attack on Jack.

Next Max attacked Betty, "that the court remove Betty Geneson as executrix for incompetency and usurping of authority". He mentioned the four hundred dollars for sale of the hay, the inaccurate original appraisal of the farm and no bond.

Next Max attacked the attorney because the three and one-half acres of Betty's that had been willed to her years ago by her parents, was not mentioned in the complaint and "this indicates the inefficiency of the attorney and the fraudulent actions of plaintiff to obtain through omission from the court".

Threats were present.

1. "Plaintiff and Gene are using present road out of convenience to themselves and at the pleasure and expense of others and I pray to be compensated \$20,000 for this privilege or to cease immediately.
2. "Advise the plaintiff that if this defendant (s) realized portion from a sale is not \$49,600 that plaintiff and his attorney will be charged to recoup the difference.
3. "She (Betty) caused to be placed into an estate account of Ormeda's \$400- for hay harvested in June 1993 of which \$80- is mine and I demand with interest"

Max ended, "I ask the court to set aside this partition suit sale request without further ado. The suit asks the court to participate in fraudulent actions, by omission. The complaint is entirely slanted toward benefits of the plaintiff. I urge the court to protect all rights equally", and he signed it.

Mr. Haller's letter was brief and professional, and written after he had thoroughly digested Max's rebuttal to the complaint. He wrote commissioners would be appointed and give the court their opinion about the division of the farm. He requested our presence and the timber's people presence at a hearing "to show facts why division is not feasible".

Jack and I, and the rest of his family, would wait for a hearing to be scheduled. Jack wanted the farm sold at auction at the court house, the other family members wanted it divided five ways. Jack, the plaintiff, must prove division of the farm in five parts, according to value, especially with the timber, was impossible.

Lorna's letter arrived the same day. She thanked us for the "goodies" for the children at the church, and the plans to use them wisely. The church was having a "sale" and might "go in the hole".

"We had a surprise visitor on Sunday afternoon. Jennifer called and asked if she and her boy friend could come for a visit. She came and she said it was the first time she'd been back since Aunt Ormeda died. Very emotionally she said they were going down to the "house they used to live in and then to Grandma's house". Said she wasn't ready to go to the cemetery yet. I hugged her warmly and told her we all have to learn to accept those things we cannot change and told her she was being very brave and acting maturely. She never mentioned the trouble her parents are in, but it was evident she was seeking friendship.

"She asked if they could come back again and mother said, 'Certainly, Jennifer, any time'. She's a beautiful, young lady, high fashion. The two girls will be the ones to suffer the most. We heard the feds made a search and seizure, found marihuana packaged for distribution and sale. Of course that is hearsay. Debbie and Kurt are not ignorant, so they just became greedy. Greed can destroy people, more ways than one. Someone told us they had a 'good crop' last year and didn't get caught. I imagine someone 'turned them in' this time. Also, McCullough has filed bankruptcy, is that ironic or what? He said he might be able to save his house, wasn't even sure about that. I've always had an uneasy feeling about that operation. I guess they won't be spending time in the Bahamas and Bimini as they have in the past. Or maybe that's where their money is stashed, ha."

Jack thought McCullough might be a bidder against him on the farm. Some thought he might be in the drug business with Kurt., as well as the veal business he operated.

The latest rumor about Kurt was that he was trying to get the marihuana plant count under one hundred so it would change from a federal offense to a state offense and state laws would apply. That would be easier since his dad was a commissioner and his brother was a state policeman.

The hypocrisy and deceit in Ormeda's family was almost unbearable. Bob and Ray were calmer than Jack and I. The lawyer notified Ray we would be responsible for lawyer fees because one defendant had hired a lawyer, and she would pay her fees, so we would have to pay ours. On the same day Max mailed the two-page letter to the lawyer, degrading Jack, he mailed third class a tape of the family before and after Ormeda's funeral. We knew Max's attitude was,

"What's legal is legal, and what's family is family". With the tape was a note, "Jack, this is a tape of mom's funeral. I have dubbed from our tape of home movies between 1968 and 1972. This portions is right after the funeral portion and there are some breaks. The last part is a football game at Glenville and I believe it's Mr. Gibbie's head in the picture. Let me know how you like them. Love, Max. Show Gene and Eula and I will get them a copy as soon as I can."

Gene and Eula had already received theirs. Jack never acknowledged he'd received either the tape or the note.

October 23rd was the final day of the thirty days for the summons for Civil Suit 93-C-55 to be answered to Mr. Haller. Time was running out.

Write a letter, then trash it was becoming therapy for Jack and I. He was ready to walk to the mail box in the rain to mail a letter to Max.

"What do you expect to accomplish? All it does is take care of your feelings."

Ray read the letter. "Great letter, Dad. Don't mail it. It brings you to Max's level." Crumpled, it went in the wastebasket. Not throwing back "nasties" wasn't easy.

## Chapter 85

# Brown Leaves

Jack wanted to go to the cabin before Betty came in. How disappointed I was when I saw the beautiful green lawn we had left covered with huge, brown leaves. It looked dirty, messy.

When Jack and I went to the lawyer's office he was in court, so we talked to his secretary. We knew how Max had responded to the summons to appear for the hearing. We were surprised when the secretary offered us responses from Rebecca, Elizabeth, and Kathy. Bob had asked me to keep this confidential away from Jack. I blew it. I read them as we drove toward the cabin, and shared them with Jack. The whole purpose of Bob and Ray having limited Power of Attorney was to protect Jack. He did not need this.

The girls answered with more tolerance than Max. A thread of continuity ran through their answers, which aroused suspicions they had talked it over. They all mentioned Ormeda's name was spelled incorrectly, there were two number fourteen paragraphs, amount of acreage differed, and the mistrust in Bob's offer of \$93,000- to buy the farm and that the value of the timber was known at that time. They also said Betty and Jack were not talking, and they wanted the farm divided in five parts.

I wanted to defend Bob and his honesty. I thought their accusations were unfounded and I knew they were incorrect. Interference would only increase suspicions. Time would tell the story.

Tension prevailed. Commissioners would be hired, and paid for with money from the estate. Attorney fees were ours to pay. Betty was coming in, and a meeting would be held with everyone except us. Kurt's case was hanging, and the cows grazed the meadow, piles of manure residue on an unsettled estate.

The family was mistrusting, more than trusting.

Another huge brown leaf blew into the yard, reminder of another dark day of hurts and misunderstandings. Another day of wanting vengeance. Should Jack show the girls Ormeda's original will that completely disinherited them and said they'd gotten more use of the farm than her children ever would? Would the girls ever believe it was Jack that convinced their grandmother to include them? Would they ever believe Jack did not know the value of the timber at the time

Bob made the offer? It was a family mess.

Rain again chased us from the cabin to our home in Ohio. Bob called and said good-bye before leaving for Japan. The hearing would be scheduled after his return.

Lastly, came the answer from Gene to the summons. He asked that his zip code be corrected and that there was confusion in the two statements "real estate should be partitioned for sale" and "plaintiff wants estate allotted".

Debbie's answer was not with the others girls. "I feel that my uncle, Jack Marks, has in no way tried to divide the property as my grandmother wishes. I am sure Jack Marks knew about this appraisal before he made this offer." False, Debbie, false. "Jack has been very bitter since my grandmother named her daughter Betty to be Executrix of he Estate." Not nearly as bitter as when he found her husband next in line should something happen to Betty. Max and Gene were upset, too. "I in no way plan to pay Jack Marks's attorney fees since if he would try to cooperate with his family then there would be no incurred expenses. Since the only person this civil action serves is Jack Marks then he can pay for his own expenses." Debbie, we will, gladly.

Lastly, came Betty's answer through her lawyer on October 18, 1993. It began: "Comes now the Defendant Betty Geneson, individually and as Executrix of the Estate of Ormeda Marks, deceased, and answers the Complaint filed against her herein as follows, etc."

The beginning angered me. I knew it was legal terminology, but it was so like Betty to think she was special. The lawyer answered each complaint, very professionally. She did not consent to the right-of-way to the cabin.

Jack did not read the answers to any of the summons. What he knew was my interpretation of what they had written, and I had been gentle. It was upsetting to Ray and I.

As far as we knew, Betty never made the trip home and the meeting without us was never held. It was handled through her lawyer.

## Chapter 86

# Welcome or Not

Bob was finished with a day and half interview at Ohio State University for chairmanship of the Engineering Department, so Jack and I met him at a bed and breakfast in Columbus, Ohio, where he was staying near the campus. We had scheduled a conference with Mr. Haller in Westlake, at eight the next morning. Bob, Ray and I entered Mr. Haller's office, and since he had not met the boys except by phone and fax, I introduced them. Jack remained in the car, to avoid the stress.

Mr. Haller explained the responses to the complaint was what could be expected, and that none of them carried any weight, except Betty's, since she had a lawyer. This was a relief, yet the hurt had taken place in the way they had attacked Jack. He advised we put our energies in the commissioners, who had lots of lee way, and lots of power in the decision process. It would be "walk, talk, and report to the court" for them. This meant walking the farm, talking about whether it could be divided five ways, and reporting back to the court. Anyone could talk, and it would be an informal discussion. Since Jack, as the plaintiff, thought the farm could not be equally divided, it was his responsibility to point out reasons why he thought this were true. Pictures, or "visuals" as he called them, would be advisable. He was sure Mr. Klause would be the judge, and he stuck strictly with the law. He told us Max, unknowingly in his response, had admitted there was a right-of-way, not where the present one was, but he admitted there had been one. This should help.

Bob knew he would soon be leaving for Seattle, so as we ate at a restaurant, he summarized "Action" ideas in his notes. He left for Seattle, we left for Garfield Heights.

It was a relief to have someone to talk to about what was happening. Justine and Junior arrived for a visit and listened as we explained what the court procedures would be. Their daughter called them. Iris had a heart attack.

No one called Jack and I, and if Justine had not been here, we would not have received the message. My dad and brothers, but not my sister. I thought being women made us immune.

We stopped working on the book, Bob the Drip, which we hoped to get

published. The message was serious. "Iris had a massive heart attack. Howard found her on the floor beside the bed, sweating profusely. She did not want the paramedics to come, so Howard drove her to the hospital. Five minutes longer and she would have died. Catherization would be tomorrow at ten o'clock." That would be November 12th, 1993.

I cried, walked the floor, sniffed, blew my nose, and kept repeating, "She doesn't want me. She doesn't want to see me." I knew my presence would be stressful for her. I knew I could not, must not go and would be unwelcome. But she was Iris, my sister.

Everyone let me pace, cry, and repeat over and over, "She doesn't want me." Then Justine said, "You have to go. It is your sister. I don't care how hard it is for you, you have to go."

Sister or not, I was not wanted. I called Bob and Monika. "It might be the last chance you have to show forgiveness. I think you should go," and Bob thought so, too. I was hurt. I was scared, and yet within me was a desire to be with Iris.

As hard as I knew it would be, I had to go. I'd be there at ten o'clock with Justine, Junior, and Jack.

We entered the hospital. Howard and Pauline, a friend of Iris's, were waiting for us in the lounge of the hospital. They would go to be with Iris. I would not go. They had to find out if it were all right that I visit. Justine soon came back and told me it was all right.

Justine, Pauline and I entered the lounge on the floor where Iris was hospitalized. Howard arose, and put his arm around me, "I love you."

"Thank you, Howard," was all I could say.

The doctor came in to report on the catheterization. The muscle to Iris's heart had not been damaged by the attack. A blood clot had been dissolved. Showing the x-rays to five of us, he pointed out blockage in four places. Angioplastic would not work since two of the blockages were in a curve, and he curved his hand as he explained. The other two were at the back of her heart. She had to have surgery.

Justine warned, "No tears", and it was my turn to visit Iris. There she was, just as I remembered her, only in a hospital bed slightly propped up on a pillow. Her gray hair was held away from her face with combs.

"You look good, Iris," and with my hand I brushed her hair back from her forehead, as Mom always did when we didn't feel well.

"You two hug and make up," Howard said and put his arm around my waist.

I put my head down near hers.

Iris talked, first about the royal treatment they received while in Vegas, and then the cat door stops. A stranger had asked her how she made them, and she was happy she had given her one. There was no mention of the pictures. She went on, "I know what death is, Lenore. It's not bad. My whole body was numb, like a corpse. If I died it was all right, and if I lived it was all right. I did not care."

Junior drove me home. Justine and he would stay with Howard and Pauline, and Iris.

The sixth day after the attack, Wednesday, Iris was scheduled for surgery. Justine and Junior decided to go home and come back. Justine told Howard I would be there, if I were wanted. I didn't know their feelings about me, and I wasn't sure about Jack's and mine. Pauline was the one they wanted.

I waited. The day was passing slowly. It was Saturday, no soaps, and I waited for an entertainment center to be delivered. I wanted to be near Iris, to talk to her, to know she was all right. There was no phone in her room. I'd wait my turn.

Jack and I arrived at 6 A.M. on Wednesday, a rainy November day, at Akron General Hospital. As we entered, we saw Pauline with a cousin's of Howard, sitting in the lounge. Sleepy-eyed, they told us Iris was sleeping. Justine, Junior and Howard arrived.

We went to Iris's room. She was ready for surgery. "Either way, I'm a winner. If I have surgery and they fix my heart, I win, and if I die, I win. Our hearts are all together."

She was so brave, encouraging all of us. We each gave her a pat of affection, or a kiss, and at ten till eight she was wheeled into the operating room. For five hours, we put in time, and at last the news from Dr. Eddie, she'd come through with three by-passes and was doing as well as expected.

I loved Iris, I wanted to be there and I was, but I was frustrated. Three times she told me about her will, that it would be Howard's sister on his side, and Justine's granddaughter on our side. I did not know why she kept telling me this. If I were good to her, she would think it was to get in will, and if I weren't, she'd think I didn't care for her and was holding grudges.

The day after Iris's surgery, I was alone with her at her bedside. As usual, Iris did most of the talking, I was the listener.

She said, "Let's pray." I bowed my head and closed my eyes. We had been praying for her, but her prayers were for us. She told me God was over all and to count my blessings.

It was the cat, the mauve cat door-stop with a blue ribbon and a tinkling bell that gave me the answer. Iris asked me what color I wanted and made it for me after our quarrel. She had loved me, too, during all those months of suffering just as I had loved her, yet the pain of hurt kept jabbing through our love. When Justine brought it from Iris's home to the hospital for me, it was more than it appeared to be. It was a symbol of loving, forgiving and letting loose of the hurt that engulfed me for so long. I wanted to believe she felt this way, too.

I wanted to believe it was true, yet it was evident, Howard and Iris were being gracious and making us welcome, but in reality we were not wanted. Pauline was, and Justine was hanging in with her gentle ways. I did not know what Iris had told Pauline about Jack and I.

Wednesday, November 24, 1993, Iris was to come home from the hospital. I wanted to be there. I was not asked. I remembered once before Howard and Iris said too many could be around when someone came home from the hospital. I respected that. I made it easy for them by saying too many was not good. I knew I had to withdraw. Pauline was wanted. Pauline would take care of Iris,

not me as I originally offered and promised. Pauline could drive. Maybe that was best.

“Pauline is so strong. She can do anything,” Iris told me.

## Chapter 87

# By Gones Are By Gones

Depending on Jack for transportation was a handicap and interfered with independence in decision making, so when Jack left for the annual deer hunting trip, I knew I probably would not get to visit Iris. I hated to obligate Ray after a day at work. I was grateful Justine and Junior was with Iris, and knew she was in good hands.

Ray and I again would celebrate Thanksgiving alone. I sang an old class song to keep from feeling sorry for myself. "Look to the God of light, not down to earth." Iris knew the song, too, since we graduated in the same class. I knew she needed rest and I did not want to call, along with everyone else that would be calling, it might be too much for her. She did not call me.

More and more Jack was returning early when he left home. This time it was because the cigarette smoke of the hunters drifted upstairs to the bedroom where he was sleeping. Before leaving for home, he ate with Kathy. When he talked to Kurt, who was hunting on Ormeda's farm, Kurt said, "They're watching me like a hawk. They have seven years to make an arrest." Even after the name-calling and back-biting from Debbie, Jack offered to help her and the children.

Each day I expected a call about Iris and the progress she was making. None came, so I decided to call. Junior answered the phone. Iris came home Wednesday and they visited ten minutes before leaving for Howardton. Justine got tired of hearing praises for Pauline from Iris, and "lost her cool". I understood. Hadn't I got tired of Ormeda forever praising Debbie and her girls?

Jack knew how I longed to visit Iris. Four days after her return from the hospital, he told me he would take me. Sunday, courageously, Jack and I left, knowing Pauline would be home washing some of her clothing.

Iris lay on the sofa, working on a yellow cat-stop. I kissed her on the forehead. Unexpectedly, she showed me the scars on her legs and chest from the surgery. I was so sorry. Never having any children or surgery before, her body, until now, had been beautifully preserved. She told me how she put a floral arrangement, "creation" as she called it, from Justine's children on a stand near the door in the rays of the sunlight.

Iris held back no details as she described what happened to her. “I know what death is. You don’t care whether you live or die. This world is nothing, Lenore, nothing. I always felt bad our brothers died so young. This has changed my whole outlook on death. Someday we’ll all be together.

“I got up to go to the bathroom. I fell by the bed. My arms were numb from my elbows down and my legs were numb from my knees down. I told Howard, ‘We need help and I can not help you.’ I told him to get my peach housecoat and pull me to the bathroom on it. Then I told him what to get, and to not try to dress me. He got my housecoat, a brown blanket, my slippers and my sewing. I don’t remember the drive to the hospital, only the arms of two strong men lifting me into a wheel chair. Immediately, I was surrounded by people in white who were trying to help me. They gave me a big, round pill and asked if it helped, but I had no pain. They gave me another, and another and asked if it helped the pain, but I had no pain. Funniest thing! They arranged for a Catherization the next morning and told me what to expect, and that I would be surrounded by people in white, some of them students. Five doctors consulted the night before surgery what and how they would do it. I had Christian doctors, Christian people everywhere praying for me, and Howard, Pauline and my family. Lenore, I feel good.”

As we watched, Iris got off the sofa. She’d lost weight, and wearing a royal blue silk pair of pajamas trimmed with lace around the neck and bottom of the pant legs, got a lighted yo-yo and made it go up and down. She said she was going to play golf, and made the ball go up and down in the breathing machine. Then she did a Michael Jackson dance. She wanted us to see how well she was doing. We had come to cheer her, and she was making us happy.

We were all trying and by-gones were by-gones. Everything was right.

## Chapter 88

# Good Faith Agreement

Jack was determined and did not waver from the fact he wanted a right-of-way to the cabin property. He knew outsiders could outbid him on the farm and the family might lose it. He knew the property for sale that bordered the cabin property had sold for \$40,000, fifteen thousand more than his offer. This lost him that prospect of a right-of-way. At all costs, he wanted a deeded right-of-way through Ormeda's property. Otherwise, one hundred fifty acres at the cabin, was landlocked.

A check from Betty arrived for \$339.20 for payment on her mother and dad's tomb stone. A note read, "Thank you for taking care of this. Sis."

"Save that note, it's probably the last time I hear from her." I saved it.

Jack brought in the last rose from the garden and put it in a flower vase. For the first time he helped with the Christmas shopping. He was my chauffeur day after day so I could visit Iris. He helped in every way possible to help with the publication of "Bob, the Drip." This was a new and different Jack.

It was four years since Ormeda fell in the tub, and this would be the first Christmas without her. The Christmas cards of joy and hope helped.

The cards from my sisters, Iris and Justine, were special. I placed them on the tea server in front of my chair. The Christmas lights reflected from the golden deer on each card. In between the cards I placed a "Sister" ornament. Justine and Junior gave us an updated picture of them. Iris wrote, "Hi, Just to wish you another wonderful Christmas! Thank you so much for your prayers, love and kindnesses. We rejoice in each new day. Come visit when you can."

"A nurse, mother of five, was here today. The neighbor across from us brought me a book, "Where Angels Walk". Enjoy the holidays. Love, Howard and Iris."

I had no bad feelings about Pauline. Her helping Iris had helped me to have more time for Jack and Ray, but I empathized with Justine about being pushed out. Iris did not mention Pauline on the card.

Love was pushing out pain in the lives of my sisters and I. I hurt Iris, and she hurt me. I prayed for forgiveness. Justine stood by both of us, but in the end was hurt, too.

The card I mailed to Iris had a simple message. “Merry Christmas. Your beautiful card arrived and I have it side by side on the tea server with Justine’s, cards from my two most precious and wonderful sisters. I appreciate your invitation to come down and we will when we can. Give my love to Howard and Pauline. Happy New Year and God bless.”

Outside, white snow glistened on the ground and housetops. Inside, the Christmas tree was decorated and presents placed underneath. The mailman, happy to find the sidewalks shoveled, delivered a letter addressed to Ray from Mr. Haller. A motion would be made before the Circuit Court of Gilmer County at 11:30 A. M. on the fourth day of January, 1994 at the Circuit Courtroom in Gilmer County. The hearing before the court would include five issues, the most important one “that if the land cannot be divided, commissioners be appointed and report their findings to the court” and “if it cannot be divided, property be allotted to the plaintiff.” The letter pushed Betty “to fully administer the estate of Ormeda Marks,” An attorney at law was listed as counsel for Betty, individually and as executrix. Civil Action 93-C-55 would be in our minds during the holidays.

Bob, in a last attempt to save the farm and timber from outsiders, worked six hours in the wee morning hours and with only five days and overnight delivery to help him, in twelve paragraphs wrote a GOOD FAITH AGREEMENT. It was dated December 30, 1993. He appealed to all heirs, and was acting on behalf of his dad and Ray. The partition suit would be dismissed but all heirs had to agree, first timber, then divide the farm into five equal parts and arbitrate if the heirs don’t agree. All agreements must be returned to him by January 3, 1994, the day before the hearing. The lawyer would be notified, the partition withdrawn, and a 5saved. Bob, adding humor, ended, “Everyone has veto power on this. We are walking on egg shells. I hope there are no heir-line fractures.”

Timing was close. Quick cooperation from all heirs was essential. Bob was on egg shells.

I called Iris on New Year’s Day. Her heartbeat was regular but the incision and chest bone were sore. They were eligible for a handicapped sticker for their car. She ended, “God sends top quality to me. I almost died. I knew I’d go to heaven.” I knew she would, too.

The ball dropped at Times Square. It was 1994. Ray was DJ-ing. Bob and Monika were having a party at their home in Seattle and Jack and I were ready to eat pork, cabbage, and potatoes. Jack’s first words in the New Year were, “Let’s eat”, yet the doctor repeatedly told him he must lose weight. I thought of last year at Ormeda’s when she tinkled the bell, breaking the silence in the huge house, to ring in the new year. It was her last time to celebrate.

Betty was the “heir-line fracture” to the GOOD FAITH AGREEMENT. She was against Jack in every attempt, because she had not received free gas for her cabin. The hearing scheduled for January 4th would be. Bob faxed Mr. Haller a copy of the agreement and the refusal.

## Chapter 89

# Try Again

The phone rang at our hotel room in Glenville on January 3rd. Gene and Eula had come for the hearing and were in Room 117, near us. We planned to have an early breakfast together the next day.

“We don’t have any electricity,” Jack said to awake me. It was January 4th, and Civil Action 93-C-55 would soon be starting. We dressed in the dark. Jack pulled the cord to open the draperies, and the news broadcasters were right, a snow storm had come during the night. Everything, including the car and the parking lot, was covered with a foot of snow. There was no electricity, no gas, no telephones and limited mobility.

Gene was wearing boots, so he took the lead as we stepped in his footprints in the snow to a nearby restaurant. The restaurant was cold, but by candlelight we ate food cooked with bottled gas . We could order biscuits, but not toast, since there was no electricity. We tried to laugh about what was happening. Eula announced Lesa’s engagement.

It was nearing eleven thirty, time for the hearing. Gene volunteered to walk up the hill to the Court House to find out if the Judge and the lawyers were there. It was closed. He walked to the office where he would ask Betty’s lawyer. He knew no more about it than we. There would be no hearing, and we were two hundred fifty miles from home in a snowstorm.

Gene and Eula decided to go home. Gene was missing work, and that with the cost of the trip was a lot of money. Jack said, “We’re not going anywhere.” Another night at the hotel, another fifty dollars, and no utilities.

Jack wrapped in blankets and read. The knock at the door interrupted his reading about Schwarkoff.

“What are you doing here?” It was Gene and Eula.

“We got as far as Burnt House and couldn’t make it.”

“Even with chains?”

“A tree was across the road. Gene got under the truck in all that slop and put on chains. We backed up and turned around. We didn’t know whether we’d make it on the hill or not.”

“No use to spend all that money. Stay with us tonight.” They moved in.

There were no telephones, no TV, no shopping, but we could walk to the restaurant and eat.

“The newspaper would like an interview with people stranded. I told him you and Eula would like to do it.” Jack told us.

Eula and I walked across the street to the Glenville Democrat office. After an interview, we had our pictures taken. It would be published in two weeks.

The next morning, the parking lot was plowed. We decided we would travel together for twenty miles, and each go our own way. No one knew what would happen to the hearing.

Dirty snow, three feet high on either side, evidenced the work of the snow removal crew.. Each guard post, neatly in line held a foot of clean snow on top. In the background, pine trees drooped from the weight of the snow. Uncertainty as to what was ahead mingled with the beauty of winter, the semis, trucks, and cars.

Jack cautiously, patiently, stayed in line with the vehicles trying to make a January journey. At 77 North in Parkersburg, like a miracle, the roads were clear, over the Ohio River Bridge and on into Ohio. We would soon be home.

Jack called to see if Gene and Eula had got home before us. They were not home. They had to turn around again. They stopped and talked with Mr. Haller's secretary, who told them we'd be notified by the Court or Mr. Haller when the hearing was rescheduled.

Gene and Eula visited Kathy, who had not tried to make it to the hearing. Elizabeth had given her Power of Attorney, and she was sure Rebecca would. She had not talked to Betty since Ormeda's funeral . Debbie waited for Betty's approval before she would make a move.

Gene and Jack got home eleven o'clock that night. They were stopped by more fallen trees across the road.

Iris called me for the first time since our “out” over the pictures and her heart surgery. I was happier than I'd been for a long time.

Dated January 12, 1994, the second notice was served by Mr. Haller that a new hearing was scheduled for January 20th at eleven thirty.

Mr. Haller wrote in a cover letter to Bob and Ray, “I do not believe it is productive to present testimony other than general statement the land is not fairly and conveniently divisible by survey.” He suggested, “Maybe the delay will afford your family time to reach agreement on the farm and avoid the necessity of pursuing the litigation.”

January would be remembered as the storm of '94, below zero temperatures, lowest ever recorded in the Cleveland area minus twenty-two degrees below and advisories to stay home. So we did, for three days. It was one year ago on January 16th Ormeda passed away. Howard and Iris celebrated their fifty-second wedding anniversary. Justine called from Florida to tell she had taken Junior to emergency. He could not walk. They had taken tests, results would be available Thursday. Mac, Jack's dog friend, was doing fine.

The test results showed inflamed, ballooned discs in Junior's back. It was temporary.

Gene, Eula, and I arrived at the Gilmer County Court House for the second scheduled hearing for Civil Action No. 93-C-55. Jack stayed at the hotel. We sat in the middle of the auditorium- like court room. A custody case was ending.

Debbie, Kathy and Rebecca arrived and sat behind Gene and Eula. Debbie did not have eye contact with me. Kathy spoke to us all, and Rebecca was busy getting in the seat by Kathy. Kathy passed pictures of her family to Gene and Eula, and they passed them to me.

I saw Mr. Haller up front. All eyes were on me, as I walked toward him. “Mr. Haller”, I said, interrupting his conversation with an uniformed officer.

“Can we talk?”

“Today what I plan to do is explain legal procedures. This is just another day’s work for me.” It meant more to us than that.

I motioned to the others, and we moved into a room off from the auditorium. We all sat down, except Gene, at a long table with the judge at the head, and the two lawyers on either side of the judge.

Attendance was noted and recorded and the Civil Action number identified. The court recorder was at work.

Mr. Haller presented the plaintiff’s reason for the action and outlined much of what he had faxed Bob the day before, the division of the farm best be placed in the hands of three independent persons agreed to in advance, “the timber be cut to sixteen inches”, and that time be allowed for the family to try to work things out. He allowed ninety days for this, but after consulting with Betty’s lawyer, changed it to four months, which meant Misty 28, 1994. Commissioners would be appointed at any time during the four months and could be called to “walk” the farm and make a decision as to whether it could or could not be divided. Jack would pay his own legal fees.

Betty, through her lawyer, requested a correction that the 3.7 acres she owned was now owned individually by her.

Mr. Haller emphasized, “If you don’t sell the timber, you’ll lose more money than you ever thought,” and “timbering is best in the winter”. Mr. Haller said good-bye to us at the restaurant, looking very distinguished in a beige golf cap and long overcoat.

Bob’s GOOD FAITH AGREEMENT and the hearing had achieved one thing, the family was talking instead of delaying or not answering when written communications were sent. Bob thought the lawyer was trying to fulfill his grandparents wishes in their wills.

Iris served fruit, sandwiches and drinks when we stopped to visit on our way home. She said, “Lenore, we can get angry and lose our temper and God still loves us.” She had come to terms with what had happened between us, and I had, too. We had no time for grudges.

Mr. Haller later interpreted the hearing in a letter. “The most important procedure was not actually what the court did but it explained the events that will happen and afforded and opportunity to reach agreement and economically benefit by it.” He mentioned:

1. Timber to 16”, which was a compromise to please Betty.

2. Select three qualified, disinterested appraisers to recommend if it can be divided
3. Failure of division would result in sale.

## Chapter 90

# Up in Smoke

Jack, Ray and I returned from an eight day vacation in Florida, with Bob and Monika and their family, Justine and Junior who was there in the RV, and Monika's dad and stepmother from Texas. It was Monika's fortieth birthday on February 22, George Washington's birthday, and we celebrated at the Delta Resort.

After the birthday celebration, we all met in Room 4133 and watched the Winter Olympic's ice skating competition. Millions would be watching TV because of the publicity of Nancy Kerrigan's knee injury by Tonya Harding and her groupies from Oregon. Scores showed Nancy in top position, but she did not win the gold medal, came in second for the silver, losing to sixteen-year old Oksana Baiul, an orphan from Ukraine. Nancy had performed well, but the news about the injury overshadowed the event. Tonya came in eight, after getting a second chance because her skate lace had caused her trouble.

The Olympic events lingered in our minds. Ray and I read the book "The Client" by Gene Grisham as we traveled from Florida and discussed it.

Ray took the Jimmy and dropped it off at a garage. Jack and I would pick him up after we delivered papers from Mr. Haller to Gene and Eula. Ray was told, "Take it and see what develops," so Ray took the Jimmy and started home ahead of us to be ready to DJ.

It was Ray on the phone at Gene's home. "My van stopped on Route 480 near Tiedelman Road. I walked for a mile, and am calling from a BP station. AAA will not tow it until I'm closer home to talk to them. I'm going across the street to McDonald's. I'll wait for you there."

Jack saw it first, a flat-bed truck with a police car beside it. "Is that Ray's Jimmy on that truck?"

Jack honked his horn and pulled up by the police car. "What are you doing with my van?"

"Brooklyn police. Follow me to the police station."

We could see the hood was up. "Someone hit it. Wonder if anyone was hurt? We could be in for a lawsuit." Jack was thinking out loud.

"Don't be hard on Ray. He did the best he could." I told Jack.

The truck went around a curve in the road. We could see the Jimmy. "It's been on fire," Jack said unbelievably.

"Do you want a pill, Jack?"

"I have my nitroglycerin. Not yet."

"Be calm," I said as we parked at the police station. We followed a slightly bald red haired officer into his office. It was not easy to put together what he was saying.

"Do you have AAA?"

"Yes."

"Then we'll charge you for the tow, fifty-five dollars. We'll let AAA pay for it."

"Do you have registration?"

"No, I always keep them at home."

"A truck driver called the van was on fire. The fire department put out the fire. We went to BP looking for someone, but no one was there. Is the driver safe?"

"Yes, it was our son. We're going to McDonald's now to get him."

I waded through the snow to the restaurant. I wanted to tell Ray. He sat alone, staring out the window at the parking lot waiting for us. I walked up from behind and put my hand on his strong, broad shoulder.

"Ray, this is something that could happen in 'The Client'. Your dad wants to tell you. Come on. He can tell you as we drive home." I decided Jack should tell him. Ray, like us, found it hard to believe. He had just picked it up at the garage.

"Ray, God was taking care of you. What if you'd have been there and tried to put out the fire, using snow? What if your DJ equipment had been in it?" The policeman said the van was completely demolished. This van had been my choice. Ray and I liked the van. Jack never did because the engine, he thought, was too small to pull the boat. Monday, Ray notified Allstate, our insurance company.

Ray told his friend how the van was making a clanking sound when he pulled off the road and walked over a mile to call his dad. He was quiet, not expressing his feelings but on a piece of paper dated 2/15/94 he wrote:

Time to kill, time to go back

Time to look ahead, time to reflect,

Time to fall in love, time to take a long walk,

Time to change the world, time to stop.

No, I'm not sorry

If I ever get too fat,

I don't mind, I've got time

Yeah, I've got time.

He has time. He's twenty-nine.

Jack spent the next five days going from dealer to dealer looking at vans while Ray worked. After work, they would go together to see the best prospects of the day. Ray decided on a twenty-one thousand dollar van, 1994 model, white Chrysler with blue interior. The insurance company paid him seven thousand

for the Jimmy, he had three thousand saved and Jack and I paid him three thousand we owed him. This made a decent down-payment and the rest would be financed.

Jack, Ray and I went to the police station to see the Jimmy for the last time. The fire had been a big one, everything, body, tires, engine and tires were destroyed. "Completely demolished", the police had said and he was right. My son was safe!

## Chapter 91

# An Antique Dresser

Basil, Ormeda's nephew who faithfully each night was by her side, was sixty nine. It was March 3, 1994.

A letter arrived from Colorado. It was correspondence from Betty, the first Jack had received in months. He eagerly opened it, and again was disappointed. She wrote about "distribution of personal property of mom's and "I did not receive Jack's because I inadvertently sent the copy to the wrong person. This time I'll send a copy to his attorney, to Bob and to Jack to alleviate the problem. Sorry, Jack."

Betty was apologizing to Jack. Hard to believe. She summarized the results of Phase I in the settlement. Now she was going into Phase II and wanted returns by March 10th. In the agreement, if two people wanted the same item they were to get together and work it out. Jack and Betty had both checked they wanted an antique dresser in the back bedroom. Her pressure tactics began, "I have great memories. I got spanked for tearing the teeth out of grandma's comb to clean grandpappy's fingernails. Another time I melted a comb holding it over an oil lamp."

Her agreement was that she would take the dresser to Cripple Creek and deed it to Jack. How on earth would we ever get it from Cripple Creek if we got to it before someone else was there? If Jack died first, then what? Jack was humble as he checked other items he wanted, a cane, a wooden wardrobe, family portraits, crocks, a rake and snippers. I thought he should have something of his mother's.

Last night, Bob believed Betty would never give Gene power of attorney to cut the timber. Today Betty had agreed. This meant all eight heirs had agreed to timber the farm.

Maybe it was bad timing, but Jack and I were going to Seattle. Jack needed to be near if the timbering started, I needed to bug the editors to publish "Bob, the Drip", but Monika needed to have Thoracic surgery on her shoulder and we were needed to help with the grandchildren.

Monika drew maps and Jack chauffeured the children to their many activities: Hockey, ice skating, basketball, gymnastics, Awana's. Tae-Kwong-do,

horse back riding and church. I helped at home and with home schooling. Down by the stream that ran through their back yard, Jack put a hand-made water-wheel he had shipped from Garfield Heights. The month in Seattle went fast. At six o'clock in the morning, the three children were in the van ready to take us to the airport. They slept on their way home.

Ray met us at Cleveland-Hopkins Airport in the new white van April 8th. From one son to the other, each precious, and from one lifestyle to another. Our lifestyle was so simple compared to Bob's and Monika's.

For the first time my sister and Howard were realizing they would have to live with limitations. They had been to Vegas and when they returned Howard was in the hospital for eight days. They did not want to bother us in Seattle. A stroke and cancer had been ruled out. Pneumonia, pleurisy, hernia and inflammation of the stomach was the diagnosis. Howard had been through so many life threatening situations and each time he'd been able to pull through like a miracle.

Justine and Junior were home from Florida early so Junior could go to his home doctor for his back. Their granddaughter had passed two pea sized kidney stones from her good kidney and the stint would stay in for two weeks. This was not good news for a twenty year old girl.

Jack's family was being forced to cooperate. Gene was in West Virginia signing contracts for the timber. Mr. Haller wrote that three commissioners had been appointed for Ormeda's estate and that they would "take an oath faithfully and impartially to make partition accordance with the terms and requirements of this order and shall give to the plaintiff and defendants at least ten days notice of time and place of executing his order, and they shall return a report of what they shall do under this order as such commissioners to this Court." The day this would "take effect was the 30th of Misty 1994 to afford the parties an opportunity for settlement."

Four living presidents attended the funeral of the 37th president of our country, Richard Milhous Nixon (1913-1994), age eighty-one. The presidents were Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan and George Bush. President Clifton said, "Misty the day of judging President Nixon as anything less than his entire life and career come to a close." Perhaps this is what he wanted for himself, to forget what the news media had said about his womanizing, dope, a draft dodger for Vietnam and Whitewater while he was Governor of Arkansas.

Ormeda was a Republican, and so was Richard Nixon. She never accepted Watergate was his fault. She could see no bad in Richard Nixon. In his book, "In the Arena" he wrote, "In the end what matters is that you've always lived life to the hilt. I have won some great victories and suffered some devastating defeats. But win or lose, I feel fortunate to have come to that time in life when I finally enjoy what my Quaker grandmother would have called 'peace at the center'".

He was the only United States President to resign his office to avoid impeachment.

At the Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace, Yorba Linda, California, 42,000 viewed the flag- draped mahogany casket in twenty four hours. He was

buried April 27, 1994.

## Chapter 92

# Personal Property Settlement

This trip to the cabin brought many disappointments and realizations. The wild flower seeds did not grow, perhaps planted too early in the spring or the deer ate them. The man-made water dam I had constructed was destroyed and a huge culvert put in the stream to change the road. The creek bed I'd leveled off and planted grass seeds had been rutted out by the oil trucks. The cabin and the yard looked worse than I had ever seen it. The futility of doing things at the cabin became real to me. Things I'd put my heart and soul into doing had no meaning to anyone else and no respect, and nature had not been kind.

"Are we defeated?" I asked Jack.

Jack and I began work. We unpacked the car, carried in clothes, food, bed linens and put them away. Jack started mowing the grass. By dusk, the place looked decent again, and the croaking of the swamp frogs, the hoot of the owl and the song of the whippoorwill cheered us on. The mouse that ran across the floor challenged us.

Gene and Eula arrived after midnight, later than we expected. They were exhausted and went to bed.

Tomorrow would begin the phase of the personal property settlement where each of us would pick up the items we had signed for on the list, if we were the only one that wanted it, and if two wanted it they were to work it out. Betty left the keys to the farm house with Helen, and given us the message to pay her ten dollars if we bothered her, since she was ill. Helen earned the ten dollars, but there was resentment that Betty was giving us orders what to do, as if we had no mind of our own to make decisions.

Eula and I left early Saturday to go to the blue house up the holler even farther than Ormeda's to get the keys. Jack and Gene left this to us since they went to talk to a neighbor that was disputing the boundary lines for timbering.

Helen was not home. We left word for her to drop off the keys to us.

Helen arrived, thinner than I remembered, but her dark eyes with black

circles under them, still sparkled when she spoke. "Betty told me to stay here when people were getting stuff."

Eula assured her, "You don't need to. We'll bring the key back to you when we're finished." This did not satisfy Helen at all.

"Betty told me to stay here and keep my hours." If Betty were paying for this, then why were we told to give her ten dollars?

"That kind of puts you in the middle. Looks as if we're not trusted," and she was in the middle between Betty and us and what each wanted.

Helen gave the keys to Eula and she and her daughter drove across the meadow.

Jack, Gene, Eula and I started looking through the boxes for the items on the list that was to be ours. Jack brought down the trailer, and Gene helped him load the huge wooden wardrobe on it. Then they loaded a metal bed that we would use at the cabin so Lesa could have hers. The two items we were not sure of was the antique dresser and a cane. Bob had made a counter-proposal for the dresser that we would pay one hundred fifty dollars for our half of it, and if Betty wanted it she would have to pay more. We had not heard from her. We did not take the dresser.

Betty wrote on the list Jack was to take the cane from the downstairs bedroom. It was a modern cane, one Ormeda used in her later days. The two antique wooden canes were in the upstairs bedroom. It was not clear how she arrived at which cane Jack should take, so we took both of them, with uncertainty and doubt.

Gene and Eula loaded in the trunk of their car a wicker table, a trunk, a chair and small items, and started home. They would come back later for an antique bed they stored at the cabin.

When Jack and I returned the key to Helen, she lingered, perhaps thinking we would give her ten dollars. We did not. She deserved it, but we were not slaves to Betty's words.

After a visit from Justine, Junior and their black poodle, Jack and I returned home.

I called Iris to see if it was convenient for us to visit. "Our car got stolen today. We came out of J. C. Penney's and it was gone." Howard was talking more than usual. "I'd just bought a gun for over four hundred dollars for Ray and it was still in the box in the trunk of the car. I'd like to get my hands on the person that did it. The police brought us home. We had to get a locksmith to help us get in the house, but in the end, we did it ourselves, took the door off the hinges and reached in with our hand to unlock the door. Too bad we live in a country where you can't go in the store to shop for two hours without your car being stolen."

Howard was outraged. The thought of them in a police car was funny to me.

Iris picked up the conversation. "We called the store security, the Akron police, the Norton police and our insurance company. It was our new car, the Oldsmobile, that only had 27,000 miles on it. I loved that car."

"I know you did, Iris."

“Pauline’s coming tomorrow and we’re going to get license for the old one. We were going to give it away.” I knew this was her way of telling me we were not needed, but I said it anyway.

“If Jack and I can help, we will.”

“Pauline will be right here.”

“You feel so deserted, your privacy invaded when someone steals from you.” I thought of her saying I stole the pictures.

“Maybe they needed it more than we did. We try to be so honest. I told the police I had just had heart surgery and I couldn’t let it upset me too much.” I could tell she was also trying to keep it from upsetting Howard too much.

“Good luck in your efforts tomorrow, Iris.”

“We’d better hang. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye.”

I did not know when we would see them. Howard’ voice was strong, Iris had a great attitude, and they had Pauline.

## Chapter 93

# Love is You

Ray came into the living room where I was sitting in my green chair. He put a package neatly wrapped in newspapers in my lap.

“Open it. I won’t be here on Mother’s Day,” he insisted.

“Oh, I’ll save it until Mother’s Day,” I said, feeling shy about it.

“Open it,” Jack called in from the kitchen.

Tearing the taped newspaper, I saw a large wooden plaque, In large, gold, shiny letters I read, “LOVE IS YOU, MOTHER. Love, Ray.” On each side of the lettering were two large columns in the same shiny gold. On the right was a small ladies hat decorated with lace and small pink roses. Ray, twenty-nine and still a boy to me, remembered me. I got up from the chair, hugged him, and thanked him. I placed it on the wall in the laundry room near the ironing board. I spent hours ironing his clothes, and this would be a reminder of his love for me as ironing was a way of showing my love for him. Ray left for the cabin.

This was Jack’s second Mother’s Day without Ormeda. It was thirty-three years for me without my mother. I had learned to let Mother’s Day happen without any big expectations. Jack served me breakfast in bed. A red carnation from a Chinese restaurant was in a vase on the table. Bob and Monika’s card didn’t reach me, since she addressed it to me but put her own address on it, and it was returned to her. Monika called. Bob did not talk to me. He was too sleepy.

## Chapter 94

# Over the Slope

Mr. Haller gave the family until Misty 30th to give evidence progress was being made for settlement of the estate. This was eighteen days away, including week ends. Mr. Haller wrote, "At the present time the timber is to be divided as it is not sold."

The right-of-way to the cabin was given priority.. Betty would agree only with conditions, one being it would be of concrete. No one could afford that, and she knew it. Jack said he would not have Betty dictating and manipulating him for the rest of his life. No one wanted to lose the farm to outsiders.

Gene spent hours and achieved power of attorney to timber, the trees had been marked and unless Betty agreed to the right-of-way in the agreement, the estate would be required to pay for this work. Betty would come in Misty to get her personal items from her mother's home and maybe something would be decided then.

Jack and Bob decided on a plan which would extend the length of time the right-of-way would be available to us. They would extend the time to June 8th. That would give Gene time to get a contract and sell the timber through bids. Then they could drop the partition suit except for the right-of-way and that Betty must get the will administered. The right-of-way would be out of the hands of the heirs and decided by the court. Bob said this was like "clear water".

Jack was happy. Bob left for a business trip to London and Italy.

The widow of president Gene F. Kennedy, who was assassinated thirty-one years ago in Texas, died in New York on Misty 19, 1994 after a four month battle with cancer. Her children, Gene F. Kennedy, Jr. and Caroline Kennedy Schlossbery planned the funeral. She was buried on Misty 23rd in Arlington National Cemetery by the eternal flame she had lit for her slain first husband.

The day Jackie Onassis was buried, Jack and I were at our daughter's grave, whose name was also Jacqueline, planting grass seed and putting a spray of yellow roses on her grave. We planted grass seed around Jack's father and mother's new tombstone. Jackie Onassis was a lover of words, and so was I. At the cabin, I wrote:

I stood on the hillside, sprinkling water on grass seed  
Planted only yesterday on your grave.  
I never held you, never watched you grow.  
Watering, so the seeds, too, would not die  
Before they had a chance to grow.  
Three old men, below did not know my mother grief.  
I call, "Bring water", I call again.  
Not one of the three hear.  
My voice died in the wind, as my baby had died.  
The baby's journey never begun, the old men near journey's end.  
All to eternity.

Jack and I were ready to go home. We were on the steps of Aunt Vi and Lorna's house, saying good-bye, when Lorna said, "There's Paul and Betty". A small, dark van stopped on the other side of the road from where we were parked. Paul, Betty, Debbie and Misty got out of the van and glanced at us.

Jack made a bee-line across the road and over the slope to where Betty stood. "I've waited three days hoping to see you. God has laid it on me to say I'm sorry. I didn't mean what I said up at the house. I don't want anything to happen to you." I hoped she knew he meant when he said, "I hope your backbone falls through your asshole".

"I know," Betty answered.

As soon as I saw it was Paul and Betty, I said to Lorna, "I want to get out of here. I might say something I don't want to say." I knew Aunt Vi and she were in the middle of all this. I got in the car.

The four of them paraded in front of the car. I focused on Misty, Debbie's daughter. She was tall, gangly, dark haired, not as pretty as I remembered her. As she looked at us sideways, I could see the look of hate toward us. She had been programmed well.

Jack and I drove off, leaving Betty hugging Aunt Vi.

Jack said, "That's why we came, wasn't it?" It might have been for him but certainly not for me.

## Chapter 95

# A Weiner Roast

Justine and Junior met us at the cabin to go to the four cemeteries we went to each year on Memorial Day. They did this for me. We were at the cemetery watering the grass seeds when Kathy and her family drove up with a trunk load of peonies from the yard at the “schoolhouse”.

“Betty left early. She planned to leave Thursday morning but left Wednesday night. She asked us all to meet, and when we did nothing happened. Debbie, Rebecca and I were with her at my house.”

“Did she mention the timber?” I asked.

“No. When we asked about Elizabeth leaving her furniture in the house past the 30th, she was hesitant, but said it was all right. That was all she said. I don’t think she saw a lawyer. I don’t think she even visited the cemetery. Just loaded her stuff. She looked old and Paul helped her out of the chair.” She did not take the dresser but did take the dining room chiffonnier which she had not signed for on the list.

Kathy’s family, Justine and Junior, Gene and Eula, and Jack and I had a weiner roast at the cabin. When we left, we visited the cemeteries and then went to Howardton to celebrate Justine’s sixty-sixth birthday. The big event was going to the dog races, where we lost lots of money. I learned you can’t win by looking at a dog.

Bob’s trip to London and Italy was disappointing to him. He got sick from the water, left his passport at the motel and had to get a taxi to go back for it, and had trouble with scheduling. He called Monika four times and us one time. We were glad he was safely home.

## Chapter 96

# Drink Water

“No gifts, if I want anything I’ll go buy it.” This was the directions Jack gave Ray and I for his sixty-seventh birthday on June 8th, 1994. No cake or ice cream either because of his diabetes. He didn’t want to eat out, so he fixed a steak dinner for us all. Many cards arrived but his only gift was a set of woodworking books from Justine and Junior. His comment was, “I heard from everyone I care about, except Bob.” Bob never paid much attention to special days and Jack and I threatened to forget his birthday to let him know how it makes you feel.

Ray, putting his hand on his side, said, “I hurt right here, but don’t tell Dad. I don’t want to worry him.”

“Drink lots of water,” and I thought of my niece with a hundred kidney stones as he took a bottle of Evian water and went upstairs. I looked at pictures of the anatomy and concluded it was kidney stones again.

At seven o’clock Jack was gone in a flash after getting a call from Ray at work. I was not ask if I wanted to go. He was gone.

Jack called. On the way to the hospital Ray vomited. He was in severe pain, and tests were being taken.

I called Justine in Virginia attending her granddaughter, Tessie’s, eleventh birthday. I faxed Bob, “Ray is in emergency at St. Alexis Hospital. Think it is kidney stones. Called from work. Taking tests. Will keep you informed. Mom. All: Drink lots of ‘good’ water.”

I sent the fax at nine o’clock, about an hour after Ray called from work. About eleven o’clock, Jack called. The doctors were taking blood tests, putting dye in his veins and taking x- rays, and would do an EKG. This allowed time for Jack to come home to get me.

Ray was in Room 232-2. The tests were over. He wanted clean pants, shirt, socks and a cap. I bought three magazines for him. We visited three hours and came home.

Friday morning we were in no hurry because the doctors would be finishing tests. We were wrong. At ten thirty Ray called. The doctors were taking him in for surgery. “Don’t let them do a spinal block,” his dad told him. We were

so sorry we were not with him.

In fifteen minutes, Jack and I were in the car on our way to the hospital. We waited in a small lounge on third floor. The woman volunteer helper had no record of Ray's surgery. She said she'd call when he was removed to recovery. After forty-five minutes, we became concerned. He went into surgery at ten-thirty and we were called at one-thirty. A lot of anxiety went into that three hours. He would be in recovery an hour.

From the door of the third floor waiting room we saw Ray on a gurney being pushed into the elevator. Ray knew us. The dark circles under his eyes looked even darker on his ashen face. We followed and all of us went to Room 232-2, and he was moved to his bed. He shook his head and grunted when his dad joked with him. He wanted rest and sleep.

The doctors had removed one huge kidney stone, and told Ray he could not take it home with him.

Ray had prescriptions for pain and antibiotics when he was dismissed to come home at seven the next evening. He'd been gone a day, a night, and a day, and missed D J-ing, and seeing the Beach Boys concert. He went to bed in the downstairs bedroom, nearer the bathroom, with a bottle of Poland spring water by his bed. The stint would be removed two weeks later.

Ray's surgery was the same day, June 18, 1994, Orenthal James Simpson, (O. J.), nicknamed

"Juice", a famous football star for the Buffalo Johns, was jailed after police trailed him in a white Bronco driven by a friend, Al Cowlings. He was suspected of the murder of his ex-wife Nichole Brown Simpson and a twenty-five year old waiter, Ronald Goldman.

The watching and listening TV audience became possessed with preliminary hearings that would determine if O. J. could be a suspect. O. J. would stand trial. It was predicted it would be six months before the verdict was reached. Never had a murder trial attracted the interest of the people as this one did. When it was over, the American people would think of the hours spent watching as the trial unraveled, including me.

## Chapter 97

# Karoke

As the O. J. Simpson murder trial preliminary hearings developed, people, between running to their TV's to see what was happening, and trying to maintain their own responsibilities, Jack and I were on our way to Florida to meet Bob. Bob was attending an IEEE World Congress on Computational Intelligence and Jack and I would be his guests at Walt Disney World Dolphin Resort. We arrived June 26th.

Bob received two outstanding awards, one for two years as past president of IEEE, and one for being elected to the "grade of 'Fellow' for leadership in and contributions to the field of neural networks", the highest award given in the IEEE organization, the largest professional organization in the world.

It was the last night together. Bob said, "Come on, Mom. Let's do Karoke."  
"I can't sing."

"Neither can I. Come on. We'll do 'Country Roads'."

In the entertainment center at the Dolphin, Bob and I each took a mike. The words to the song was on a large screen in front of us. They announced this was mother and son. The music started. We started. Bob got tickled and dropped out, and I was singing alone. I knew I was off-key, but I went on singing until Bob joined me again. He took the lead, and did well. Jack got up and left. He was embarrassed. Together Bob and I finished, "Down country roads, take me home." The producers gave us a recording, and I knew how terribly I had done.

We got word from Monika Gene had received two bids on the timber, one for one-hundred nine thousand and the other for one-hundred twenty thousand. He rejected both bids.

In the morning, Bob returned to Seattle, and we started home.

## Chapter 98

# Doctors Prosper

On our trip from Florida, Jack and I visited Justine and Junior and stopped at the cabin. We celebrated our forty-fifth anniversary July 2, 1994 and the next morning the congregation at church sang “Happy Anniversary” to us. We got home in time to be with Ray on his thirtieth birthday, and give him the belt buckle Jack bought him in Florida, and a portable telephone. Bob and Monika sent him a tie with musical instruments on it.

Junior called. Justine was going into the hospital for gall bladder surgery. We had seen her only three days ago. We unpacked, repacked, and was on our way back to Junior and Justine.

Justine was in Thomas Memorial Hospital in South Howardton, West Virginia, the day after Ray’s birthday. At four o’clock that evening, Junior, Jack and I and their daughter, Karen, saw her on the gurney leaving for surgery. At four-thirty when the doors opened, we could see she was still talking to the attendants. At ten till six, the doctor gave the family his report. Surgery was completed in about seventy minutes. There were more than a hundred stones in her gall bladder, but Federal law prohibited her taking them home with her. He had removed the gall bladder which was enlarged and bloated. There were no stones in the pancreas and the tube, but the pancreas was inflamed.

After recovery, Justine was taken to Room 301. Junior leaned over and said to her, “How are you doing?”

“It’s hell. I’m not going to do this again. It’s no fun. I’m a wimp. I’m not brave like Iris. I acted the way I hated for patients to act when I was in nursing. I knew I was fighting and flouncing with my arms and legs and they gave me morphine but it caused spasms and didn’t work for me.”

Junior spent every minute he could with her, helping her when he could. Jack and I visited once a day with other family members. None of us could take her place with Mac, as much as we tried, and Mac drooped around waiting for her.

Jack and I returned home before her release from the hospital. After five days, on Monday, July 11, in the afternoon, Junior brought her home in the car. Justine had a four-inch incision as she requested because she wanted a cancer

search. Three days later the staples would be removed, and Justine had her first surgery, after helping hundreds as a nurse.

Jack and I missed the thirteenth annual family reunion to be with Justine. There had been a rain storm that day, and we hoped it had not been a failure.

Things happen in threes, so it was my turn after Ray and Justine. The doctor's requested a colonoscopy after they found blood in my stool. For two days, I could have nothing but clear liquids which included a gallon of "Colyte and Liter solution". I had to drink eight ounces every ten minutes until my stool was clear and free of solid matter. Everyone who had this test was laughing at me, because they knew about it.

I gargled water after each drink of the solution. I stayed near the bathroom, not daring to go to the basement to do laundry.

At four-thirty the next day, I had the colonoscopy. The procedure lasted fifteen minutes. shorter than most, and I was in recovery for an hour. The results were no polyps, no cancer. This was a relief since of my diagnosis of cancer seventeen years ago. Thankful, Jack and I ate at a Chinese restaurant. The next day I had two teeth filled.

Gene called and said two new companies walked the farm property and looked at the timber.

## Chapter 99

# Basil

I celebrated my sixty-ninth birthday, the best yet. Even Iris's card arrived on time.

Basil and I were about the same age, but the doctor's told him he had only a year to live if he didn't get medical help. They put him on medication but he refused to be hospitalized. His attitude was, "I have to die, so why not now?"

After Basil and his wife divorced, Basil lived in his mother's house up the creek a short distance from Ormeda's. The house was inhabitable but in need of attention, almost a shack. Two men, both unmarried, low income and in need of a place to live moved in and together they worked out a method of survival.

Jack visited him on Saturday, August 18th, a few days after my birthday. This is what Jack told me about his visit.

"I rode up on the four-wheeler and knew he was home. I drove down his driveway and saw him sitting on the front porch. He said, 'Get off of that thing and come in and set a spell'."

"When I sat down, I almost flipped backward in the chair.

"It won't go over,' he said.

"It's already scared me to death,' so I sat on the edge of the chair.

"How are you, Basil?"

"Not too good, Jack. If they can't reverse this thing I only have a year to live."

"Reverse what thing?"

"My heart beats too fast. It was beating so fast that it was generating fluids and causing a fluid build up in my lungs."

"Of course, my thoughts went to the cigarettes that he smokes and he was presently sucking on one. I mentioned the cigarettes were not helping his heart or congestion and maybe quitting would help both.

"Basil explained he wasn't going to work too hard to extend his life, but wasn't particularly anxious to die. We mutually agreed that the fear to die was hypocrisy and if we were afraid to die we really didn't believe scripture teaches that Christ prepares a better place for His.

“We talked about what is a Christian, and agreed that he was a Christian. In the conversation, he brought out that he was not good, he came short of being a Christian. He finally agreed being good didn’t make a Christian but his belief in Jesus Christ, and that none can be good.

“We talked about his mother, who in her latter days was in constant prayer. not for her salvation because she was a Christian, but that God might see her through the sting of death.

“I suggested he be baptized not for salvation sake but carrying out another commandment of Jesus.

“He told me, ‘Yeah, here I am with a short time to live and everyone will say, Look at Basil, trying to get right with God just because he’s dying.’

“I told him that was pride and Heaven has no place for pride. It would be a good place to get rid of it right now.

“When he mentioned his ex-wife, I told him we both thought he “screwed” up by letting her go. I thought she was angry at him or his mother, or both, and wanted to be by herself for a while, and he turned it into a divorce. We thought she was a fine lady. He said he would decline if she wanted to take care of him. I told him that was pride again.”

## Chapter 100

# Timber

Ormeda was gone, but her memories and manipulations lingered on in the lives of her sons and daughter. The three loyal helpers were each having health problems, Basil with his heart, Helen with problems undiagnosed, and Dreama whose husband was seriously ill with emphysema. They had served till the end, and now their time had come for others to stand by them, as much as possible, being so far away. Basil delayed being baptized.

“We like to travel alone. You get more attention.” Jack showed identification at Cleveland- Hopkins Airport and Jeremiah and Josh were our boys for four days before their mother and father and Marilee arrived from Seattle. The boys would be here nineteen days, all of them for fifteen days.

The time together would be divided between being at the cabin and Garfield Heights. It was August, the hay was being cut, and it was the right time to ride the four-wheeler on the hills and over the newly cut meadows. To make it even better, Jack borrowed a four-wheeler from Paul Marks. It was a delight to watch the children get bolder and bolder each time they shot a gun at a target. It was a delight to see them share the four-wheelers with each other as well as the adults. It was a delight when little Marilee for the first time, wearing a helmet, rode the four-wheeler alone around the meadow on a warm August day. It was a change to a different lifestyle when we returned to Garfield Heights, with only a driveway between the houses.

Eula called. Our share of the timber money was here. They held our check and we could pick it up when we came for a cook-out. The total sale September 10, 1994 was for \$160,109.- and after expenses our one fifth would be \$26,429.73. Penn West Trading Company, Inc. of Corry, Post Office Box 33, Corry, Pa. 16407 was the buyer.

Our family and Gene’s family sat outdoors at picnic tables and ate together. The “new” money would make a difference in our lives, and a difference in the farm we all loved so much. We sacrificed heritage, yet were convinced we could lose the smaller trees if the larger ones were not cut to allow for their growth. Gene enclosed a note, “Remember the \$15,000 is to be used for the division of the farm and my expenses. If the farm is not divided the money will be divided

among us.”

Penn West had twenty-four months to complete the timbering. The check was deposited in savings on the day our bank changed its name from Transohio to The Star. It was a big celebration as we ate at Chi Chi's. An important part of the estate had been settled.

## Chapter 101

# Pillow Love

Cancer. What is this disease?

How does it choose its victims?

Can anyone be at ease

As it stalks the earth

Choosing whom it please?

Cancer chose Junior. Junior, honest, sincere, family man, always the healthy, happy one. Junior, Jack's childhood friend and brother-in-law.

On Sunday, September 25th, 1994 Junior entered Thomas Memorial Hospital in South Howardton to be prepped for prostate surgery, diagnosed malignant. Emotionally ravaged relatives and friends concealed their greatest fear and let rays of hope shine through.

Accept my appreciation.

You were there from the beginning.

Supporting, cheering, like a bird to sing

Hope for a future

Through doubt you did bring.

The doubt increased when the doctor, in conference, told the family he would be in surgery one and one-half hours to four hours, and in intensive care up to four hours. Surgery was scheduled for Monday at eight-thirty, but the family should be there at six.

Room 301 at the hospital was making history. This was the room Justine was in when she had gall bladder surgery and their granddaughter was in after surgery. Now, at six-thirty on Monday, Junior left the same room midst farewells for surgery.. He passed us, wearing white above-the- knee stockings and white cap. As he passed me, I whispered , "Bless you."

Jack and I knew we could not help Junior, but we could be with Justine and the family. All of us left to go to the cafeteria for breakfast, except Karen, the oldest daughter. The nurses called her into the surgery room. Junior was being sedated and talked incoherently. "I hate needles. I hate needles. Where's Mom?"

"Eating."

“That figures.”

“Think about the needles Brenda had.”

“I can’t think of anyone but myself now. One of those pretty nurses is going to shave me.”

Dr. Hannah made the incision at 8:08 A. M.

The family was sure everything was all right after an hour and half. They felt sure the cancer was contained in the prostate. At eleven o’clock the doctor reported Junior was doing well.

The surgery was four hours long.

At 11:45 the doctor reported everything went well. He had to withdraw another pint of blood, which made four pints of blood he’d given Junior during surgery. He saved one nerve in the urethra and possible part of the other nerve. The nodes were enlarged, possible from the procedure. The test for lymph node frozen section had returned no cancer, but had been sent for further testing.

Tuesday Junior sat up, attached to thirteen different instruments.

Thursday, at noon he was moved from ICU Room 4 to Room 329.

Friday, the pathology report returned “not good” that cancer cells had been found in surrounding tissues. Junior and the family sank to a new low.

Crying for me

With prayers and love.

Kindness, time and helpfulness,

As God from above.

Take my appreciation.

Sunday Junior returned home with Justine and his three children and their families with him. Jack and I thought the family should be together, so we made a quick trip to the cabin. We would return.

Wednesday, on a misty autumn day at nine-thirty, Jack and I said good-bye to Justine, Junior and Mac. Junior was able to walk outdoors. Tearfully, we left each other, leaving them to fight the biggest battle of their lives, the uncertainty of cancer and the fight of cystane kidney stones with their granddaughter.

Howard and Iris sent flowers, many cards, and called, cleverly avoiding Jack and I.

## Chapter 102

# You Were There

Justine just does not write letters. You could wait and wait. She'd call, but not write, so on October 13, I was surprised to see a letter in her handwriting addressed, "The Jack Markss".

"How can I express to you how much we appreciate your kindness, time and helpfulness. I can't but I hope you realize our appreciation. From the very beginning you were there for us, supporting us, driving and feeding us, cleaning, cheering, crying for us, YOU WERE THERE. Thanks a million."

Junior wrote, "I want to tell you how much it meant for me for you to be here with Justine, your support, love and prayers. I love you two very much." We knew he did and we loved him, too.

I'm much better now.

My catheter leaks.

I'm on bladder relaxer.

Walking isn't easy, somehow

Recovery is slow, I wish it were faster.

Jack told Junior, when the catheter was removed, the pain was unbearable. Twenty-three days later Junior called and said when the catheter was removed "he held on to the arms of the chair and his knuckles turned white. His granddaughter had passed thirty-six kidney stones."

I have hope you gave, I have love unsurpassed.

You are lover and friend. Prayers forever last.

## Chapter 103

# Three Sons

Bob was trying for his dad. He suggested a four-person conference call, Betty, Max, Gene and himself, and thought the girls would accept any reasonable proposal. Again Max rejected having the conference call and called Mr. Haller. He threatened to have the farm sold himself if everyone did not return their Power of Attorney slips to Gene by November 8th.

As I read Max's proposal and personal note to Jack, my reaction was Max is completely ignoring that Jack should be protected from the stress of his mother's estate. He did not accept that Bob and Ray were in charge now. Secondly, he was gathering the girls as groupies, because he immediately got on the phone to the girls that Bob wanted a conference call without including them. Thirdly, he outspokenly called Jack and his sons "Indian givers" when Bob told him not to use his dad's part of escrow to pay for surveying the farm. Lastly, he threatened by saying it would all be over January 1, 1995.

On Halloween Day Max called Jack, after months of silence between them. Jack told him to talk to his sons, that he got too excited.

"Don't get excited," he told Jack.

Jack and Max talked. Then, after the goblins and witches retired from trick-or-treat, the phone rang. Gene, trying to call Bob, accidentally called our number. The family was talking again. Max called Jack. Gene called Betty.

Betty, stubborn and holding out till now, said divide and then we'd get the right-of-way. Immediately, Jack and Gene said they could not accept that, since they had no assurance. She said she would have her lawyer to see if a new appraisal could be made to reduce our taxes. She let Gene have all the remaining personal property of Ormeda's for \$2,200-, including the antique dresser which should have been Jack's, if she hadn't wanted to flex her muscle and show her power.

Jack needed to get away from all that was going on. We took a trip to Marileeland to visit Walter and Alesia for three days. We had not seen them since their trip to the cabin for my birthday. While there, we visited our ex-principal in a retirement home. If anyone could help you relax, it was these Christian friends.

Max mailed all the heirs a Power-of-Attorney form to complete that would give Gene the right to divide the farm. Bob would not accept it, and wrote in changes and mailed it back to Max. The deadline date had passed so new forms would have to be sent. Bob overlooked Max's smear campaign in his last letter and responded as a gentleman.

## Chapter 104

# Bob's in Taiwan

Bob, as a professor of engineering at the University of Washington in Seattle, and Editor-in-Chief of IEEE Journal called *The IEEE Transactions on Neural Networks*, travels world-wide. He was going to Taiwan and wanted Monika to go with him. Jack and I volunteered to take care of the three grandchildren during their travels. This would hurry us for Christmas, but we could do it.

It was the middle of November, a sunny day, and I began preparations for the trip. I wrote names and addresses on the Christmas cards a month early, on November 17th, and remembered one year ago Iris had heart surgery. I addressed her card, although our friendship remained cool.

Sometimes I cry and wonder if Iris misses me as I do her. Sometimes I cry and wonder if she would like to see me as I would her. Sometimes I cry and know that for now I must stay away, I am not wanted. I finish addressing her card. Justine told me Howard had flu when he went to visit his sister. I live closer than that, but they don't come see me. I wonder why.

I decide not to mail Max, Betty and the girls Christmas cards. To do so right now, would be hypocritical and that is not what Christmas is about. I told Jack, "The cards are here. I did not mail them a card. They're your family. You do what you want." He did not mail them a card, nor did we receive one from any of them. Five years ago Ormeda fell into the tub, and for five years the family battled.

Gene and his family went to the farm and farm house to get the "bargains" from the two thousand dollar bid. Gene said he would deduct three hundred dollars for the stove Debbie took. They brought home the Gravely tractor, other stoves, and received a bid on the baler. They would get the rest at a later date.

Max was home and they saw him. He told them Betty's lawyer would write a Power of Attorney for division of the farm that would please everyone. Bob's suggestions would be included.

Gene and Eula were becoming master's of the skill as to when to talk, to whom, and what to say or not to say.

Before leaving for Seattle, I decorated the house simply and enough for Ray to feel the Christmas spirit. I put a small ceramic Christmas tree in the picture

window, put Mr. and Mrs. Santa by the door, and put Christmas pillows on the sofa. I put a few presents under the tree, to make him curious.

Bob and Monika decorated early for our visit. The Christmas tree was in red, which matched the red carpet. Lights on the tree and around the banisters reflected in the windows, which made it look like double lighting. Monika served Christmas dinner early and we opened presents and they left for Taiwan for a week.

Home-schooling was hardest for Marilee and I. She said I spit when I talked, and I probably did with my newly bonded teeth, so I held my hand over my mouth. Every time she came to the letter "j" she'd get her pencil and make the tail longer. If I wrote in the workbook, she'd complain I was pressing too hard and erase what I had written. If the reading was too hard for her, she'd turn her head and whisper. I didn't want her to be the winner, but I did not want to get angry.

"Let's rest for a while," I said. When Monika returned, she told me Marilee did not want me to know she needed help. She told her, "Show Grandma how well you can read," and she was afraid I would think she wasn't doing well.

Jack did well with taking them to their activities. We went to church, to hear the home-schoolers choir, and to Tae-kwon-do testing and Christmas party. Bob and Monika returned from Taiwan loaded with Christmas presents for all of us.

The simple Christmas I left was waiting for us when we returned home, except what was simple became elaborate when Jack presented me with a ten thousand dollar diamond ring., "a stone" as Betty and Debbie called them. Money from the sale of timber paid for it.

"You're worth every cent of it," he told me.

"Our mothers would think how foolish this is," but our mothers lived at a different time and would understand, if they knew the anguish of the last few years

My neighbor and I went for a bowl of soup and a drive to look at the Christmas lights. 1994 was gone, the new year of 1995 was ahead.

## Chapter 105

# Fiduciary Notice

On a dreary, damp New Year's Day, 1995, the Cleveland Browns won the football game at Cleveland Stadium against the New England Patriots, twenty to thirteen. Next week, they would play Pittsburgh.

Jack, Ray and I did not eat Christmas dinner with Gene's family as we had in the past. They came to visit and we exchanged gifts in our home. They said tree removal was scarring the surface of the land more than expected.

January 7, 1995, fans for the Cleveland Browns were disappointed and stunned. The Pittsburgh Steelers trampled the Browns at Three Rivers Stadium in Pittsburgh, a score of twenty-nine to nine. This meant Coach Basil Belichick and his team had failed again to reach the Super Bowl.

The Steelers rejoiced. The Browns mourned.

The January weather was a contrast to the weather when Ormeda was buried two years ago. Then, even though it was January 20th, it was jacket weather, but today it was cold, snowy and windy. Jack complained he hurt between his shoulders, but refused to go to emergency. He had a fever. The sugar reading was 208 at midnight. He said, "I lived two years longer than Mom. I wish my family didn't hate so much. Love them, they need it. They don't have many people that love them."

The doctor took an EKG. It wasn't Jack's heart. He x-rayed his lungs. Nothing wrong there. He didn't know what it was, said pain didn't show on an x-ray and told him to go home and take Tylenol and wait a while.

Waiting was in front of TV watching the O. J. Simpson murder trial opening statements.

Saturday there was no O. J. Simpson trial or soaps to watch on TV, so Jack and I went in the first big snow storm after Ground Hogs Day to Great Northern Shopping Mall. In his shirt pocket, Jack carried a ten thousand dollar diamond he was taking to J. C. Penney's for a second appraisal. After having it appraised himself, he talked to the manager at the store, and they wanted their own appraisal. The ring would be gone a week to New York to an independent appraiser.

Predictions were the storm would get much worse, so we hurried home. We

could see the footprints of the mailman leading to the mailbox. Jack searched the legal advertisements in the Glenville Democrat and found what he was looking for, a fiduciary notice from the fiduciary commissioner stating, "Notice is hereby given that the following account is before me for final statement," and the account with Betty as the executrix, was that of Ormeda's. "Given under my hand this 2nd day of February 1995." This meant further legal action by Jack to get this done was unnecessary. At last, Betty was doing her job.

## Chapter 106

# Unwrapped Vengeance

There were discrepancies in the date the fiduciary report was closed, the date it was mailed to us, and the date of the check, which could have caused trouble in closing the estate, but people were tired of the struggle and did not act upon it. However, Jack called the commissioner and requested a copy of income and outgo since Ormeda's death.

Betty did not pay for the deck on the house she flamboyantly had installed when work began on the pavilion. The cost was \$1,881.63, deducted after Ormeda's death. I wondered if Ormeda died never knowing who paid for it, perhaps thinking it was a gift from Betty. There was a refund on the shower stall of \$475.65 because of a swap, labor for hay. Helen was paid over a thousand dollars after Ormeda's death, which included \$200- for caretaking the residence. I remembered the request from Betty each of us pay ten dollars each time we bothered her for the key. The report showed she was well paid. So the money I gave her was a tip.

Dreama was paid almost a thousand, and the utilities were almost \$250-. Betty was kind, only taking \$300- for administering the estate. The unwillingness to share with others and allowing two years of bitterness and hatred to fester in the family made her almost unworthy of that.

The estate settlement was complete with a payment of \$325.11 to each heir, the check dated January 13, 1995, early from the February 2nd date the fiduciary commissioner signed to allow ten days of complaints to be made. The checks were probably made after Gene paid two thousand for Ormeda's personal belongings.

The vengeance that was unwrapped before and after Ormeda's death remained. Jack wanted nothing to do with his sister and brother, Max. Repeatedly he said they were not welcome at his funeral, either at the church or cemetery.

"Jack, take that money and buy something you want. It's the last thing you'll get from your mother," I told him.

"I'll buy a gun I've been wanting." He deposited the money in the bank.

The last thing he will receive will be his fifth of the farm. Who knows what

that will be?

## Chapter 107

# Waiting

The largest murder trial in history was beginning for the murder of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman. Orenthal James Simpson, (O.J.), a famous football star was being held and opening statements were made on Tuesday, January 25, 1995 for the murders on June 12, 1994. The People would be represented by Prosecutor Marcia Clark and Christopher Darden. O. J. had a “dream team” of five or more attorneys for his defense. Judge Ito would preside at the bench. It would be televised and capture the attention of the people worldwide. It was predicted the trial would last six months or longer.

The diamond ring Jack bought me with monies from timbering the farm returned from International Appraisers in New York with an appraisal of a thousand dollars more than Jack paid. We would keep the ring. I was delighted. Jack bought diamond earrings and a diamond surround that was soldered to the engagement ring he had bought me when he was a soldier in Italy. Never did I think Jack and I would be able to afford such luxury. Never did I think sparkling diamonds could mean so much.

My doctor appointments kept us from going to Florida to visit Justine and Junior. I let my thoughts stray from myself to Bob in Japan. A news flash reported a “Toxic Attack” in Japan and I knew Bob left on Sunday. A toxic gas, sarin, which was developed by the Nazi for use in World War II, had been released on five trains in the subway. A single drop on the skin could be fatal. The attack, March 20, 1995, left ten dead and 5,500 injured

What a relief twenty-four hours later when Jeremiah answered the phone. “Dad’s all right. Said he wasn’t near the subway. Will be home in five days. They’re investigating.”

## Chapter 108

# The Timbered Hills

News about O.J. Simpson's murder trial continued.

Tonya Harding's ex-husband was released from jail for hurting Nancy Kerrigan's knee.

Max Tyson, the heavy weight champion, was home in Ohio, after being imprisoned for rape.

Right and wrong, one side against the other, and the search for right endings was in every news broadcast and in our own lives. To escape, Jack and I decided to go to the cabin. The weather was weary, spring was trying to push away winter, and we were trying to push away the blues. We were not sure we could get to the cabin, and might have to go to a motel. We wanted to see the results of timbering. It was worth a try.

About a hundred logs, six to fifteen feet in length, stacked high, met us like a giant waiting to greet us as we entered the farm. We crossed the bridge, the trailer dragged, and started over the one lane dusty road through the meadow. We could see the florescent light that jutted out from the garage, once like a beacon beckoning us safely home, out, now giving the message, "No more. She is gone."

We drove through an open gate, by the more-than-ever dilapidated farm house. We passed the barn and an old saw mill Jack's father had built. We could go no farther. Where grass had beautifully grown was a large mud hole. A huge stack of newly cut logs, once trees, waited to be hauled to a saw mill.

Two strangers on a four wheeler came down the hill. One, a supervisor, the other the worker that cut the trees and dragged them down the hill with a tractor. The shock of seeing us slowed their pace and with squinted eyes to see us better, they approached us and it seemed as if they were glad to be together, against us, the enemy that was invading.

Jack introduced himself. Embarrassment showed on their faces. The contract was violated, and they knew it. At all times the roads were to be passable to us. As if slaves to a master, they carried huge rocks and filled the holes in the road.

Slowly, Jack drove the car pulling the trailer over the filled chuck-holes.

A glance at the hillsides made a shiver go down my spine. Huge tree trunks and branches stuck out from the hillside like large toothpicks . Uprooted trees, roots exposed, were where upright trees once grew. I compared it to Mt. Helen's volcanic eruption in damage. Soon we were at the second gate that marked the beginning of the cabin property.

We passed through the gate. The one lane road on our property was smooth. The hills were uninterrupted, as we left them. The feeling was one of leaving a dungeon into the light of day.

Jack and I began work. To rest, we took a load of things to Lorna for the church. I stood by the car, alone. Three huge truckloads of logs from Ormeda's farm passed. This is what I wanted to see, I thought. One truck, then another, then another. I cried. What did this mean? The end, a new beginning. Was it worth it? Ormeda was not here to see it. The farm land was damaged, money distributed to the heirs. Then I remembered her threat to sell the timber and give the money to Debbie to buy a new house. She had not thought of us, or Gene, or Max, or Betty or the three girls. I was torn with emotion.

I went into the house. "That's a heart jerker. Three loads of logs went by from the farm," and I knew no one understood my inner turmoil.

Jack took frequent trips to watch the men timbering. "I flipped the four-wheeler. Scared me. I sat for a while, thought I was going to pass out. Never felt like that before. They asked if I wanted to go to emergency. I told them to wait. Don't think I broke my hip, just bruised my "butt"."

Forty minutes later the supervisor arrived in a truck. "Came to check on you. How are you doing?"

"No breaks. "Butt" blue and swollen. Thanks for your thoughtfulness. Think I'll be all right."

Lorna returned our visit. Then Jack and I worked, in the cabin, outside the cabin, until everything was in mint condition for Ray and his friends. We loaded three bags of trash in the trunk of the car and returning to the main road over a right-of-way that was now legally ours, noticed crushed stone, about five truckloads, on road where the chuck-holes had been They had more than pleased us.

## Chapter 109

# He Knew, I Knew

The twenty-six thousand dollars each heir inherited from the timbered land was now spent or invested. The diamonds Jack bought me would always be a reminder of the sacrifice of the land of the many trees protected for years and the now interrupted balance of nature. From that came the expression of love for me from Jack.

Lots were to be drawn at the farm to determine the division. Jack was content with the idea the right-of-way to the cabin would be legally deeded to the owners of the cabin property, a priority since his mother's death. Jack knew he would not be able to go.

The last visit to the cabin burned in our memories, and would for the next month, next year, forever. Fifteen days of work in the fresh, country air, hard work, long hours, rewarding work. Newly cut boards painted white now neatly faced each outside window, a contrast against the brown building. Azaleas and red geraniums, each surrounded by its own wire fence to protect it from the hungry deer searching for food in the valleys, were planted. The breathtaking beauty of the much larger yard now, newly mowed, reached to the creek, jumped over the water, and continued on and on between the hills, on either side of the dusty road.

How wrong we were that we'd be back to "our haven" in the hills in three weeks.

On Jack's sixty-eighth birthday, June 8, 1995, we got the signal. Back pains!

The emergency room and the biopsy report gave the answer to the back pains, CANCER! More tests. The cancer had not spread to his blood, bones, or brain. Jack said, "Let all our Christian friends know so they can pray for me." Call after call was made.

July 6th, Ray's thirty first birthday, Jack was in surgery for over seven hours. The doctor had been kind. "I will work like a detective, not fast, but very carefully. Pain suggests it is near the spine."

Ray, Justine, Junior and I waited. The receptionist told us surgery started after nine, the rest of the time spent in preparation. One o'clock she told us, "Surgery will be until two-thirty. They had to remove some ribs." Poor Jack!

The cancer was on the peripheral part of his left lung and our hopes had been so high. Finally, after three thirty, a tired, pale, unkept doctor beyond middle years in age, approached us. He was breathing hard, like he had been running.

“Tumor about the length of an apple. Took out back side of four ribs. Satisfied with the surgery. Got all I could visibly see. Going into recovery. He will probably recognize you. Don’t know if it has spread, tests shows it hasn’t, but they are only tests. Misty have to have radiation, chemo. Have two tubes in chest for drainage and bleeding”. The long ordeal of the surgery was over for him.

“Thank you,” I muttered. “Thank you so much.” I knew he had given it the best he knew.

A feeling of a cold, icy hand clutched my heart and I stared ahead into emptiness. Me, a weakling, not now, when he needs me. A coward, now, of cancer, the future. No, not now. Jack needed me and I must be there, for Jack, my sons, my grandchildren, others.

Ray and I went in ICU. Jack was as we expected. He did not recognize us.

It was Justine that bought the ice cream and cake for Ray’s birthday. It was she that lit the candles. Ray’s thirty-first birthday was celebrated, without Jack.

The ring of the telephone was a continual reminder of Jack alone in the hospital, the severity of the operation, fighting for his life. It was a reminder, too, of the many people that cared, loved, prayed, and wanted to know about their own that was in pain, hurting, away from the normal activities of his life. Apologetically, Gene’s wife told us Gene was in the hospital and could not visit.

“They will put a stint up his penis and dissolve the kidney stone. If that doesn’t work, then they’ll do liposuction, and if necessary, surgery.”

Ormeda’s two sons, the oldest and youngest, each in the hospital, needing each other but with their own cross to bear.

The next day the ICU nurse told us, “Lots of pain. That’s to be expected, I’m taking the tube out. Breathing on his own.” I disciplined myself not to shout with joy.

Calls continued. Justine, Junior and I visited. Jack was sitting up, alert, taking breathing exercises and raising his arms four times. This was an important part of recovery.

Before Justine and Junior left for home, they made a special trip to say goodbye to Jack. For a moment, Junior’s dark brown eyes looked into the deep blue eyes of Jack. They saw eye to eye and heart to heart. A farewell handshake was the expression of a friendship rooted in childhood., sincere in a special man’s way of showing love, caring, and best wishes. Each knew only too well the knowledge of the threat of cancer.

It was terrible. Everyone suffered.

It was on July 17, 1995, Ray and I watched the doctor remove the staples from the incision that reached from the top of Jack’s shoulder blade, curving around under his body. The doctor saved hundreds of the staples, at my request, so the grandchildren could see them. The incision was neat, clean cut, but the

allergic reaction to the sugery tape, upon it's removal, left ugly inch square brown scars. "Those will be permanent," the doctor said.

It was only twelve days after surgery, Ray slowly and carefully brought Jack home. Ray stood by the car door, arm extended, and supported his father. Well-intentioned , curious neighbors peeped from behind curtains and stopped lawn work to stare. Jack returned home, suffering, dependent, uncertain of the future and loved.

## Chapter 110

# No Chance for Rebuttal

If Ormeda were living, she'd be ninety-two on September 20, 1995. Three days after her birthday the heirs met at the farm to determine the fate of the two hundred eighty acre farm. Gene, now out of the hospital from kidney stones and in charge, took his father's old felt hat for the drawing, recognition he could give his father for years of manual labor and his half of the farm.

Jack waited. His weakened body came from the bedroom at one-thirty. It was Ray's friend. Disappointed, he went back to bed. The next morning, Sunday, at nine o'clock he called Gene's daughter.

The cut of the cards allowed Gene first drawing. He drew "the schoolhouse" property.

Max was next. He drew the plot of the farmhouse and eight acres. Disgusted, he said, "I'll burn the damn thing down," and left. Later, in a secretive kind of way, he sold it to Betty for \$25,000, the value the surveyors placed on each of the five parts.

Betty's lawyer drew the meadowlands for her and the four girls were now the owners of the plot behind the church, one of the most coveted.

Jack was satisfied. It was over. Gene and he had a right-of way to the cabin. From the beginning this was his goal, motivation, determination.

Jack cared for nothing now. "I don't want anything from Mom. I got what I wanted."

"The boys will," I reminded him.

Jack, through arrangements with Gene, got the barn and acreage near the cabin. There was an understanding between them they would split their barn and "schoolhouse" properties.

## Chapter 111

# Ray

Ray was fired, after seven years. A big loss, pension, seniority and job. The date July 28, 1995 took the proper place of importance in our lives. Perhaps stress from his dad's illness brought about the diagnosis of "sugar" by the doctor. The medicine caused an overreaction with a fellow worker, a squabble resulted, and both were fired.

How could he tell his dad. He didn't, about the "sugar". Confided in Bob, and after weeks, in me. The doctor was held to confidentiality.

Ray was bruised, unemployed, and no health benefits except through Cobra for eighteen months at a price of one-hundred seventy-five dollars a month. Jack said, "You can work for me." Temporarily, this solved two problems, the rejection and despair Ray was experiencing and security and attention Jack needed and wanted. As days passed, ever slowly and boring, Ray became more and more a blessing.

Jack wanted to visit Iris and Howard. Vividly the word "asshole" stuck in my mind. Vividly I remembered months of suffering, suffering that couldn't dent my love. Ray drove.

On a dreary day, I saw Iris again. Looking through the sheer curtains at the window, they recognized it was us. Howard opened the door. Iris waited. Each tried to hide their astonishment at the sight of Jack, and yet welcomed us, taking our coats and offering us chairs. Jack, in slow, deliberate words began telling them what happened and how he was feeling. Jack's condition, for the time, was worse than Howard. Jack stood, stooped, thin, pale, and weak and without warning took off his shirt and raised his arm for them to see the long, curved scar line and bandage scars.

"Jack, it's awful. It's awful what we have to go through." This was Iris's way of showing sympathy. If anyone knew, it was Howard and Iris.

The visit was short, one I should have never dreaded. Empathy between two sisters, each over seventy years of age, whose husbands were seriously in need of their love and care, replaced the hurt and suffering brought about by another bond, family pictures.

Our young femininity had faded into changes that take place in all young

girls. With physical and spiritual courage, I knew we'd honestly look life straight in the eye, facing the diminishing physical and mental activities that come with old age. Each of us, and our husbands would be there for one another, through despair, illness and the crushing sting of death. How beautiful and strange life is.

Howard and Iris stood in the cold air and waved good-by as Ray backed out of the driveway. Each of us, being brave for the others, knew this was possibly the last time the four of us would be together, two sisters married to cousins.

The bonding on this day never faded and never will. It is kept alive through prayer, sharing, telephone and mail, and that special part of your spirit you have for people you love.

## Chapter 112

# The Verdict

October 3, 1995, the verdict of O. J. Simpson in the murder of Nicole Simpson and Ronald Goldman was to be announced. Before the jurors, alternates, lawyers and a TV audience unheard of in our country before, in the Court House of Los Angeles, California at one o'clock Eastern time the Clerk of Court read:

“Not guilty in the murder of Nicole Simpson.

“Not guilty in the murder of Ronald Goldman.”

The verdict divided the country. O.J. Simpson was a free man, released to his own freedom, not to the freedom of public opinion, not to a civil law suit which would follow by the families of Nicole Simpson and Ronald Goldman. The social issues of wife abuse, violence, race, police competence, the jury system, money and prestige to win a case buzzed on talk shows, news broadcasts and filled the tabloids.

Individuals in the world not directly involved in the case squelched voicing their opinions, unsure of the reaction to listeners or those who might overhear and ever so lightly or violently disagree. Hidden then, in each individual, was their feeling and analysis of the case, except, of course, those legally or financially involved. A few brave souls that ventured forth.

## Chapter 113

# Chemo

Christmas, New Year's and 1996. Cards, prayers, words of encouragement and endearment arrived daily. Each day, each hour, I prayed for healing in Jack's body, mind, and spirit. Each day I prayed for my own strength and wisdom. I was thankful for being shown the way. I let others know our appreciation.

Jack had now been in and out of the hospital five times, overdose on lung and pain medications, clogged bowels and nerves. Faithfully Ray drove his dad until the twenty-five radiation treatments were complete. He was admitted to the hospital for one-three day treatment for chemo on November 6, 1995, Room 238, Bed 2. You never forget the feeling and that room.

Ray and I watched a video about chemotherapy. The words, "Temporary damage to healthy cells" and "Can temporarily damage blood cells" planted themselves in my mind.

Jack was near death, after the hospital fourteen days in Skilled Nursing Care. Each day we were at his bedside four to six hours. I talked to the head of Social Services and through her prepared for three alternatives that were ahead, home care, nursing home or funeral home.

Jack couldn't walk, his bowels were blocked for twenty-two days, and Ray carefully helped him turn in the bed. Breathing was difficult. We took turns rubbing his back and feet. Medications were being changed to meet his needs.

Conversations were short, intense, personal.

When he said, "I can't take it any longer" I threw him a kiss. "No manhood, no nothing left, a shell."

The doctor got a nerve specialist. It was too early to determine if Prozac was helping. Other medicine was prescribed for depression. "No, he had not tried to hurt himself, before this he was very jolly, and he does not want to be alone" I answered the specialist's questions.

Often from the hospital, Jack called home. "Come as quick as you can. I'm worse than I've ever been." As quick as we could, and he'd be asleep. He'd told us never to wake him. We didn't.

"If hell is worse than this, I don't want to go there."

“You’re not going to hell,” I said, avoiding the issue that he might not be happy at the hospital, or with the nurses, or the food.

“Get me out of here.” I investigated procedures for admittance to the Cleveland Clinic.

“I’m dying. I’m so weak I can’t walk. Can’t have a bowel movement. Take me home.” I called the ambulance. He was home four hours and the ambulance returned him to the hospital, to a private room, reverse isolation. Later he told me he remembered nothing about the trip home and back to the hospital in the ambulance.

Low blood count, chemo had suppressed bone marrow. He would need ten to fourteen days. Hope!

“I can’t even dial the phone.” He told the nurse I was a “fuss-budget”. “I’m getting worse. Can’t breathe. Spit up gallons of that “guck”. This was our Thanksgiving Day together. I never gave up hope, I never stopped praying, thankful I was there for him. Ray left for Seattle.

More and more I was getting information from the social service director, rules and regulations about how long he could stay, insurance coverage, names and addresses of people.

On December first at seven o’clock I wanted to shout. Jack had a bowel movement. A practitioner used “the claw method”. After twenty-two suffering days and nights that medication could not budge. I called friends.

There was a short visit from Max and his family from Florida. Not much said but the effort and time were appreciated.

Another great thing happened when the lung specialists were summoned and the flem and “guck” suctioned from his lungs. Within a few hours, Jack began getting better. Physical and occupational therapy were begun, to strengthen his arms and legs, to teach him how to get off and on the potty, to go up and down stairs and use the walker. Each day he watched for me, and each day I was there.

A potty, a bath bench and a walker arrived at our home. Jack was coming home. Ray arrived from Seattle on December 8th, and I scheduled his release for December 10th from the Skilled Nursing Care. At two o’clock, tucked under a blanket in the car, Jack came home again. Home care would begin the next day.

Jack has been home ninety-one days. He tells me he never wants to go back in the hospital. The winter days are long, minutes and hours pass slowly. Ray and I help time pass with massages, foot rubs, talking and reading to him and shopping and walking in the malls. Each night, the day is ended with a call to Seattle to talk to Bob. Bob is patient and kind, and gives of his love and time, and will visit again at the end of next month when he comes to New York for a conference.

Prayers have been answered. Jack is not well, but we have been given an extra eight and a half months to have him with us, to show him our love and to care for him. He has reached a plateau in his recovery. He’s an old man now, thin, frail, feeble, and brown straight hair replacing the curly hair he lost after chemo. When Ray and him go out, he uses a cane, for balance as well as

protection from others that might bump him. His medication is now regulated, his bowels move and he eats well. His opinions and ideas are highly valued, and if he did for his sons before, he does even more now

I am old, grey haired, stronger in character, and closer to God and God's people. I have been unselfish in caring for Jack, selfish only in the satisfaction I received by loving and caring for him. I read the Bible each night and pray, pray, pray. I know hope, faith, and answer to prayer. Jack and I know love and support, prayers, caring from people, churches and organizations.

Money is not a problem. Insurance has been good to us.

Ray is leaving in a few days for Las Vegas. He has honored his father with six months of devotion and care. When he returns, he will get a job. I know something special is waiting for him.

It is human nature to hope not just for ourselves, but for others. We are not in a position now to help others. We can let them know we care.

The doctor told Jack and the family the quality of life Jack now has versus more chemo and its possible benefits. We know that if one tiny cancer cell has escaped surgery, radiation and the one chemo treatment and its reproductive part not deadened or weakened, the cancer will spread. We have now accepted that. We love each other and accept God's love. It is my prayer if Jack dies before me I am at his bedside as he leaves this world we shared together for forty-six years, with our two sons that have known a father's true love. Maybe, just maybe, Jack's siblings and the next generation will reconcile their differences and the deathly gaps created will be smoothed over and forgotten

The cabin property and the newly inherited property from Ormeda will help Bob and Ray make a dream come true, just as it was a part of our dream.

Cancer. What is this disease?

How does it choose its victims?