

Preface

The editor of our local newspaper assigned the obituary of John “Jack” Brown to me. I had heard his name in social circles, but he was not politically active, so I knew nothing about him before working on this story. Jack resided in a small township outside the county seat of Medina, Ohio, and he amassed a small fortune while on the Earth. Some of his prosperity was in material wealth, most of it in the love from the people he touched. Whether a girlfriend, a business partner, or neighbors, people found it was easy to trust Jack.

Jack Brown was married for twenty-four years and had one daughter, a secretary, and four mistresses after the death of his beloved Sarah. Of the seven loving women close to him, only Sarah ever really knew his heart, mind, and soul. She could see past his bravado to the scared little boy that hides in every man. His charismatic personality charmed her, but it could not deceive her. Her embrace on his heart prevented any of the mistresses from winning him entirely in the ten years after her death. His dependent love for Sarah was so profound that it may have led to her eventual demise. Although the mistresses could be with him, hold him, and even love him, they could never truly have him.

After his funeral, I met several of his girlfriends and his daughter at a diner next to the funeral home. His daughter, Katherine, knew he had female friends but was surprised by the number of them, their age, and the feelings they had for her dad. All the women’s reverence, admiration, and opinion for Jack impressed me. Mr. Brown had a strong commanding presence, and my biggest disappointment was not meeting him.

I wrote a feature article on Mr. Brown, which my editor reduced to about a tenth of its original size. I found it very difficult to be brief after listening to these women’s amazing stories. My original story covered about three-quarters of the obituary page. I knew this was more than any newspaper would permit, but I believed Mr. Brown’s story was something special.

A couple days after my editor’s dismantling of my article, I decided to write this book about John “Jack” Brown. Everyone at the diner that evening agreed to contribute her story. Katherine mentioned his secretary, Gail Ledbetter, who agreed to help chronicle his life. Each chapter voices the account communicated by each woman who knew him. The stories are a combination of verbal interviews I conducted and letters written to me. I tried to maintain the women’s narratives as they communicated them to me. These written narratives of Mr. Brown’s life are as accurate as the women can remember.

The six women approved each of the stories. Some details were omitted because they were too personal and some details included even though they were very personal. One storyteller humorously asked her daughter not to read the book until after she dies. Another intimated she could tell a better story if she had the time. I did not put to paper anything not approved by the women, and all seemed very happy with this book.

Chapter 1 by Gail Ledbetter

Personal Secretary for John “Jack” Brown

In the spring of 1960, Mr. Lloyd W. Sterling, the owner of Intricate Stamping Company (ISC), promoted me to personnel secretary. Nothing of what I saw while working with the files ever left the office, and “Not even your husband should know” was Sterling’s instruction to me. As personnel secretary, I received and filed all applications, and I was first to meet and work with Jack. His father passed away during the sweltering summer of 1961, and Jack took it upon himself to support the family.

He showed up for an application wearing his Sunday white shirt and a tie bought for him several years before. It was easy to see he had outgrown the undersized clip-on tie. He was very confident for almost seventeen years old and some might say he was brash. Sterling was passing the office as I explained to this adolescent applicant that ISC was not hiring at this time. Jack insisted he was dropping out of high school to support his mother and siblings.

Sterling broke in and in a commanding voice stated, “Under no circumstance are you to quit school.”

The young Jack stood in astonishment at this commanding male presence and uttered, “Yes, sir.”

Sterling hired him “beginning immediately” and set the conditions for his employment. “Throughout the summer, you will report for work at seven a.m. and work till three thirty p.m. with a half-hour lunch in between. Starting the first day of school, you will report to work directly after school. What time do you get out of class?” he demanded.

“Three o’clock,” said the rattled young man with as much confidence as he could gather.

“You shall be here at three thirty, work till six thirty, go home and eat supper, do your homework, and go to bed. You will report any Saturday that I need you, and the starting wage is two dollars and fifty cents an hour.”

This was strange because I had heard Sterling say in the past, “No teenager is worth minimum wage,” and now he was paying this kid twice minimum wage.

“Well, John,” I started, but he abruptly interrupted with a false deep macho voice.

“My friends call me Jack.”

“Well, Jack,” I said in my deepest voice, “it appears you are now an employee of ISC.”

At age twenty-five, my boyfriend John said I was quite the looker, and after being my husband for forty years, he still thinks I am a looker. I was very flattered and amused by the young man's novice attempt to impress me.

With only two weeks of summer left, the production manager, Mr. Long, didn't want to train someone who wouldn't be there to work since manufacturing was from seven in the morning until three-thirty in the afternoon. Joseph "Ol' Joe" Colachi, the maintenance supervisor, said he would take the lad. Ol' Joe earned his nickname because of the length of his tenure with the company, and to prevent any confusion with another Joe. At thirty-eight years old, Ol' Joe had been maintaining the equipment for eighteen years. My first week as secretary, I called him "Old Joe," but he quickly corrected me: Ol' was a term of respect, he said, but old was old. Ol' Joe had joined the Army in the summer of 1941, but another soldier's gun had misfired when he was trying to unjam it, striking Joe in the foot. Ol' Joe had received a medical discharge within a month while in basic training. That fateful December he'd applied for the Army again, but the Army recruiter found out about his discharge and gave him a 4-F rating keeping out of the service. I suspect this is where Ol' Joe had gotten his disdain for officers and management. On several occasions, Sterling had offered Ol' Joe a management position, but "Nobody will call me sir" was always his resounding reply. Although, it has been twenty years since he enlisted, he still has a limp in his step. Ol' Joe is a crusty man with a warm heart, and though he only spent a month in the military, he cusses as if he spent his whole life there. He believes in getting his work done and done on time, and yet he will give you the shirt off his back if you needed it.

Every day at 3:30, when everyone else was heading home, Jack would report for work. At first, Ol' Joe would have him push a broom, but after a few weeks, Jack had worked out a system to do all the cleaning in just an hour. I remember Ol' Joe complaining, "The cleaning should keep him busy and out of my hair." After that, Ol' Joe started teaching young Jack minor maintenance on various machines. Jack was a fast learner and soon was helping Ol' Joe with more time-consuming projects. One night Joe and Jack serviced a particular complicated machine until four in the morning. Sterling was extremely distressed that Joe had kept young Jack so late on a school night. Ol' Joe's defense was they had completely rebuilt the power inverter. Sterling, who rarely acted surprised, was speechless at the accomplishment. In the past, they'd had to shut down for an entire day to rebuild the power converter.

Come June of 1962, Jack was of age and had completed the credits to graduate from high school. The sales clerk had a child graduating at the same time and mentioned the seniors spending a week vacationing at an amusement park. Ol' Joe asked Jack if he was going to join the other kids, and Jack replied that he didn't have time for childish games. Ol' Joe pulled five dollars out of his pocket and asked others to do the same. Before long, the entire mill had raised over one hundred dollars for Jack to make the trip. They presented the money to Jack, but he still refused to go, arguing he had a family to support.

About this time, Sterling stopped by and heard the commotion between Jack and his coworkers. He called Jack in to my office and stated, "After one year, everyone is entitled to a week's paid vacation, and your vacation starts the day after graduation. When you return, you are to report to Ol' Joe Monday morning at seven a.m. for your assignment. Since you will be a full-time

employee, going rate for a maintenance person is three dollars an hour, retroactive to today. If you show up the Monday after graduation, I will have security escort you from the premises,” he commanded. (We had no one in “security.”) As on the first day when Sterling spoke in this commanding manner, the awe-inspired Jack could only say “Yes, sir.”

Jack worked hard all summer, learning everything Ol’ Joe could teach him. Jack would come up with these crazy ideas to improve a piece of equipment or production line. Sterling would ask for something new and Jack would expound on his plan. Ol’ Joe would stare at the floor and chuckle if it was a bad idea, and raise his right eyebrow in a reverse wink if it was a clever idea. The plant was having electrical problems, and about once a week, it would blow a fuse. One machine would continue to operate while another stopped, causing a loss of production time. Jack devised a plan integrating the electric system. It would automatically shut down the whole line if one fuse blew and none of the fuses would exceed eighty percent capacity. Ol’ Joe checked with a friend who was an electrician and confirmed it was a great idea.

On a muggy August day in 1962, Ol’ Joe and young Jack were finishing a project Jack had initiated. It was such a difficult project that Ol’ Joe looked at the floor and chuckled when he first heard about it. Sterling’s daughter, Sarah, had just graduated from high school and was looking forward to college. She preferred to use the entrance through the shop floor and my office to see her father because it saved time.

There was Jack, celebrating the completion of the project. He was cussing and swearing like a regular millwright in his sleeveless T-shirt and blue jeans. He pointed his finger in defiance at Ol’ Joe and shouted victoriously, “Told you it could be done.”

As Sarah passed through my office, which had a window to the mill, she stared at Jack for a moment through the glass barrier, then turned to me. “He is awful full of himself, isn’t he?” she said, infuriated. “Someone should take down a peg.” Sarah went off to college without seeing Jack again.

One morning in 1965 while I was waiting to see Sterling, Ol’ Joe appeared, wanting a quick word. It wasn’t wise to get in Ol’ Joe’s way, so I let him go first. He told Sterling they would have to find a new assistant for him.

“I’ll need someone who will take my place someday,” Ol’ Joe exclaimed.

“I thought it was Jack,” said Sterling.

Ol’ Joe smiled. “No,” he replied slyly, “Jack is replacing you.”

That was the extent of the conversation, and a month later Sterling had me change Jack from an hourly rate to salary plus commission. Jack was learning to be a salesperson, and he read everything he could find on the subject. Since my office doubled as the company library, I would check out the books to Jack and even ordered new books for him. His first assignment was to find companies that were no longer doing business with ISC and try to drum up the business again. It wasn’t long before he was generating sales.

“Any leads you generate in the field are yours,” Sterling told him in my office one day. Jack’s bold blue eyes just seemed to twinkle at the notion, and the possibilities ran through his mind.

The next summer, when Sarah returned from college, Jack had the small corner office next to mine. Sarah stopped at his office door and sarcastically asked if he was just as cocky as he had been in the plant. Jack boldly pronounced, “It isn’t cocky if you can back it up,” and she turned in a huff and stormed away.

Sterling asked me if I’d heard what had happened, and I briefed him about the turbulent encounter. He seemed somewhat pleased by the news and said, “I love him like a son, but I don’t think he’s right for my daughter.”

I heard they met at a nightclub in town a few nights later and started seeing each other. That winter at the company Christmas party, a stumbling Jack grabbed the microphone and stopped the festivities. Everyone thought he was going to offer a sentimental toast for the holidays. Instead, he asked Sterling for his daughter’s hand in marriage. Getting on one knee, he asked Sarah to marry him, which I thought was romantic, but Sarah stood up and yelled at him to shut up and get off the stage. Again, he asked her to marry him and she exclaimed, “Listen, you big dummy, if you’re going to be the father of my children, you’ve got to stop pulling foolhardy stunts like this!” Again, he asked her to marry him and she replied, “These people didn’t gather to see my future husband make a fool of himself.”

After Jack asked sheepishly a final time, “Will you marry me,” Sterling stood up and said, “Tell the drunken fool yes so we can get on with the party!”

The next June, they were married, and I asked Sterling about Jack and Sarah’s marriage. He remembered his comment from the year before and said, “When you’re wrong, you’re wrong. Now I’m worried about him because I’ve seen him stand up to guys twice his size, but when my daughter is strict, he looks like a deer in the headlamps.”

They went on a month-long honeymoon to the Catskill Mountains with trips into New York City. The other salesperson said something jealous about the extended trip, and Sterling pointed out that Jack’s last vacation had been in 1962.

The next few years were difficult for ISC as most of the parts produced went to the auto industry. The auto industry was changing, with more and more car parts becoming plastic. The elimination of some parts and downsizing of others left a dent in the sales numbers. Even though Jack’s sales were up, other sectors of the company were failing miserably. Jack wanted to enter into other industries, but Sterling was against it.

“All we know is automotive parts, and to change is taking a terrible risk,” he would say. Jack and Sarah tendered an offer to purchase the company from Sterling. Even with the declining sales, the company was worth a quarter million dollars. With the financial backing of the bank, Jack raised the money to buy ISC from Sterling.

In September of 1972, Jack and Sarah became the official owners of Intricate Stamping Company. A couple months later, Sarah announced she was with child and exhilaration filled the

Browns' house. Before the smiles had a chance to fade from everyone's faces, news came that Jack's younger brother had died in Vietnam. A week later, his mother suffered an unforeseen heart attack and passed away. His sister, who had moved to California to get away from Jack controlling her life, did not bother to come back for either funeral. Jack never showed it, but somehow this had a powerful adverse effect on him. All I know is that, at age seventeen, his sister declared her independence and moved to California to be free. Jack wanted to stop her, but his mother said it was futile because she would be turning eighteen in a couple of months. She was only thirteen when her father had died, and I think she resented him leaving her. The sister died a year later from a drug overdose, and Los Angeles County buried her at no charge.

Ms. Stemple, who was Sterling's presidential secretary, retired when he left the company. Jack asked me to be his presidential secretary. "What do I do?" I asked, and Jack replied, "Everything Stemple did for Sterling." Several of the management staff retired or chose to take other positions when Jack took over. Two key people stayed on, Ol' Joe in maintenance and Mr. Long, manager of production. Jack felt he needed an engineer if they were going to stay in business, and he hired a young black man by the name of Robert Owens.

Rob's old fraternity name was "Blockhouse." I never heard why he got this nickname, and he never used this moniker in business. Rob was energetic and confident, and he didn't have a clue as to the mess he was getting into. We spoke one time about his fraternity, and he said it was a black fraternity and really didn't help him when he got out of school. He said he loved and admired his fraternity brothers but added, "If I had it to do over, I would have joined an established engineering fraternity."

Directly after Katherine was born, the company received cancellations of several large orders for auto parts. Jack seized the opportunity and made a diligent search for new business. He went to a company in New England that manufactured watercoolers. They required a part that would join an existing water line to a new heater system they had developed. Jack looked at their drawings and immediately remembered a part he and Ol' Joe had fabricated for a machine they'd rebuilt. He called me and asked me to remind Ol' Joe about the part and get it to him right away.

"Use the new company that promises to get it here overnight," he said, referring to FedEx.

Jack returned the next night with some sketches and scribbled explanations in a binder. The watercooler company wanted a proposal on their desk by the end of the next week as to the manufacturing capabilities of ISC. Rob and Ol' Joe were there to meet him and I stayed with them until about 10:00 p.m. When I arrived the next morning, they were all asleep in Jack's office. They had a finished plan, but the additional machines required for this project would take more financing. Jack showered and left for the bank and came back with the financing for ninety percent of the project. Sarah instructed him to take out a second mortgage on the house to complete the financial requirements.

The watercooler company furnished a purchase order for the part, and ISC had six months to supply a trial run. The assembly of the new line didn't go as easily as planned, and there were several cost overruns. The men had underestimated the power required to keep the line moving smoothly, and they needed an additional motor. Jack asked the management to forego a

paycheck, and he would make it up to them. Only Rob and Ol' Joe agreed to forego a check for an unknown future payout, and the money was still short. Ol' Joe knew Jack had not taken a paycheck in six months and had mortgaged his house to one hundred and ten percent of its value. Ol' Joe called a contact with a firm selling motors and received a new motor to complete the build. They sold the motor to ISC on credit based on Ol' Joe's promise to make good out of his own pocket. They assembled the line in time for the trial run, and we supplied five hundred test pieces. They worked, and before long, we were into full production in a product that wasn't in the auto industry.

Shortly thereafter, we had a case of automotive parts returned for defects, something that had never happened before. The truck arrived at nine in the morning, and Jack found out about it at ten. At eleven, he asked me to call a managers' meeting for one o'clock. It was ten after one when we met the other manager in the conference room. Mr. Long, his assistant, and the three floor supervisors were on one side of the table; Owens and our salesperson Mr. Depew were on the other. Ol' Joe was sitting in the corner, and a young machine operator stood by the door.

Jack approached the young operator at the door and asked, "Are you a manager?"

"No sir."

"This is a managers' meeting, and you shouldn't be here," Mr. Brown said in a calm but stern voice.

"Mr. Long requested my presence at the meeting," answered the troubled young man.

Jack glared at the new operator for a silent moment and then coldly spoke. "Why are you still here?"

With this, I heard a "Yes, sir," and out the door the young man scurried, returning to work on the shop floor.

Jack went to the captain's chair at the head of the table and sat back while the table was bickering. He glanced back over his right shoulder to Ol' Joe, and then turned his steel-blue eyes toward the table of men. One by one the bickering stopped as Jack stared each manager into silence.

Now Jack had their attention, he asked sharply, "What's going on with this defective shipment?"

Long started explaining why the parts had failed to meet standards and placed the blame on other people.

Jack interrupted, reiterating, "What's the status of these parts as we speak?"

Tony Pirelli, Long's new assistant, spoke up and said they were still on the dock pending instructions.

At this, Jack turned to Harold Nixon, the newest supervisor, and said, "You are to get that box, open it, and sort out the bad parts. Replace the bad parts with good parts, box the shipment, and

get back to the customer tomorrow. You are to see to it personally using the three test devices, and overtime is authorized.”

Jack stared at the newest supervisor for a moment and snapped, “Why are you still here?”

“You mean now,” the hesitant Harold murmured.

The uncompromising reply was, “From now on, all my commands are right now.”

Jack later confided in me that he’d borrowed the line from a John Wayne movie.

Jack then looked intently at Long. “If I ever have to do your job again, I’ll get someone else to do it. Mr. Long, make sure those parts ship tomorrow with one hundred percent satisfaction. Now that the ill-fated order is being corrected, how did untested parts leave our facility?”

Everyone just sat there looking at Jack as if he had the answer, and knowing him, he probably did.

Jack peeked at Ol’ Joe. “Is it working?” he asked, referring to the press machine in question.

Ol’ Joe snapped, “I don’t have time to run it for them.”

Jack said coldly, “Mr. Collins, you are named as foreman in charge on the production log.”

Collins pointed out he had been doing paperwork and had not been actually on the floor.

Jack concluded, “Mr. Sommers, that leaves you in charge.”

Sommers said he’d brought in the operator who’d made the parts, then he noticed the operator was gone.

“I sent him away. He’s not management.”

Sommers asked, “Why did they send them back?”

“Mr. Depew, did you give discounts for accepting defective parts?” Jack asked.

“No, I did not.”

Concise and direct questions by Jack and short and accurate answers in return continued for about an hour. When Jack finished the questioning, the exact sequence of events that had led to the defective parts had been revealed. Furthermore, fault and blame were evenly distributed and accepted. Jack got everyone at the table to admit their fault, without accusing others. There was corrective action issued and agreed, so it would not happen again.

I recognized the tone in his voice that held all the men in the room fixated on his every word. It was the same strict voice young Jack had used the first time I met him in 1962. At age seventeen, it had been a novice attempt at being resolved in his inflection, and it had sounded brash. This was the first time I’d heard Jack successfully speak this commanding tenor. At no time did he raise his voice or use an expletive, nor did he allow anyone else to do likewise. Jack referred to everyone by his or her formal name for the whole hour, as he was direct and cold. For me to

listen to him in this authoritative mode was both exciting and frightening. No one spoke unless spoken to first, and Jack became the dominant male at the table.

Sarah called toward the end of the decisive conference and Jack remained seated to speak with her. When leaving with the men, I heard Rob say he had grown up on the streets of Philadelphia during the riots, and nothing scared him as Jack did in the meeting.

When Jack got back to his office, he sent for Terrell Denkins, the operator who usually ran the press for the defective parts. He had gotten sick and gone home at lunchtime that fateful day. Jack wanted Karen Colvin, who took my place in personnel, and me to sit in on the meeting. Terrell wasted no time in getting to Jack's office and arrived within minutes of the request. Jack questioned Terrell about why he had gone home early, leaving an untrained person to do the job. Terrell said he'd felt queasy in his stomach and had gone home to recover from the ailment.

"And you got better by the next day?" queried Jack, armed with Terrell's hours, which Karen had given him.

Terrell admitted he had still been sick the next day but could not afford to lose the hours from his paycheck. Jack explained the company policy on illness to Terrell and asked if he was aware of it. Terrell answered in the affirmative, and Jack issued a formal verbal warning to Terrell for coming in sick.

"If you are legitimately sick, I do not want you infecting the other employees. If you are hungover from too much of the grape the night before, I expect you to come to work and suffer through it. Now that finished my work as president; as owner of the company, I am pleased you thought so highly of us to come in while you were sick. Since work is twice as challenging when sick, I am paying double time for the entire week."

Karen interjected that the checks were already made up for the week.

"The checks are distributed tomorrow, and we have time to change one of them," he directed.

Terrell made a point of shaking Jack's hand before leaving and thanking him profusely.

The next Monday, Jack decided it was a good idea for us to take weekly strolls through the plant as he used to do. Stopping to see Terrell, Jack asked how he was doing. Terrell stated he would be doing a lot better if all white men were like Jack, going on to explain that with the added money in his check last week, his wife and he had the down payment on a house. However, the bank would not loan them the money. Jack asked which bank had rejected their loan and Terrell answered the statewide bank in town. Jack provided him with the name of a person at the local bank where the company did business.

The next morning, Terrell reported to Jack's office and Jack said he always had time for Terrell. Terrell thanked Jack for getting him the loan to buy a house through the local bank official. "I didn't do anything but point you in the right direction," Jack replied.

Terrell explained he had met with the loan officer and by five o'clock secured the approval of loan on the condition that his credit history checked out. The bank would have the final papers ready in a couple weeks, and they could close on their dream home.

Jack met Terrell's eyes as he was leaving and said, "Right is right and wrong is wrong. Wrong is neither white nor black for the reason that it is just wrong, and the person doing wrong is not a man. You have never done anything wrong to me and I have endeavored to do right by you."

"Yes, sir," Terrell answered, then looked Mr. Brown in the eyes. "Yes, sir," he repeated with conviction and humility.

I missed the point Jack was making until a chance meeting with Terrell about a month after Jack passed away. Terrell just had his first grandbaby, and to see Terrell's chest stuck out, you would think he'd personally built the BP building. Within a couple minutes of this chance encounter, we were having a cup of coffee and remembering John "Jack" Brown. Terrell asked me if I remembered the meeting in his office, and of course, I did. The poignant message Jack had left Terrell that morning had made quite an impression, and Terrell had educated and nurtured his children to know "right is right and wrong is wrong."

I asked what he meant by that, and Terrell explained that when he was a boy, his momma would tell him that two wrongs did not make a right. When Terrell had said all white men should be like Jack, he was as wrong as the banker who'd denied him the loan for being black. I remembered thinking he was profound for a high school dropout.

In my twenty years as presidential secretary for Jack, there was only one time he was sick. It was in the early eighties and he showed up at the office one Monday a little after 8:00 a.m. There was the occasional morning when he would drop Katherine at school before coming to the office so it wasn't unusual. In his sicken state, he walked quietly by me, barely saying hello.

Ten minutes later, a very irritated Sarah telephoned, "looking for that husband of mine." I hesitantly said he was in his office. "Oh, is he?" she shrieked frightening me on Jack's behalf. Jack and Sarah lived about ten minutes from the plant, and it took her all of five minutes to get there with a stop at Rob's office. She stormed into Jack's office and a couple of minutes later came out with Jack in tow. Jack had that "deer in the headlamps look" Sterling had mentioned so many years before.

Rob appeared at my desk, and Sarah stated distinctly, "You are in charge for the rest of the week, and Mr. Brown will not be in the office. I will call you to let you know when you can drop his car off to him. Until then, his car remains in this parking lot."

Jack glanced at Rob as if to say, "Save me," and Rob said sarcastically, "You made her CEO!"

Sarah was only the person who could have a stronger resolve than Jack's spirit. Calling later in the week, she said, "Jack sent me out to get cough syrup, and before I could get out of the driveway, he escaped to the office. He is a big baby with a 102 fever. He will cough up mucus, then announce he's feeling better and should go to the office the next day. He won't stay in bed, won't admit he is sick, and it's taking everything I have to keep him down." When Sarah was

aggravated, Jack's charm and charisma had no effect on her. When Jack got full of himself, Sarah was the one to bring him down a peg.

Jack was a charmer. I remember a time in the late eighties when three young women visited from a nearby college. The three students were representatives of a sorority for women in business. Their request of Jack was a speech on business at the college for career day. We met in his office for an hour where he was telling jokes and anecdotes about himself and the company, and he agreed to the speech.

After the women left, I mentioned he was flirting with the young women, and Jack protested. "Those young girls? I'm old enough to be their father." I indicated that if he'd asked them to remove their clothing, they probably would have done so, and Jack rolled his eyes at me in disbelief.

The 1980s were beneficial for ISC. We doubled the plant size, tripled the work force and added a few managers while quadrupling the number of parts to person-hours worked. Jack was interested in hiring a female manager after the meeting with the women in the business sorority. He had me send job requests to all the usual locations and told me to send one to the girls' sorority on that campus and at a couple more colleges. One of the graduates, who sent us a resume, was one of the students who visited the year before. Jack was impressed with her qualifications because she had good grades and work as an assistant manager in a restaurant. I called her for an initial interview, and she interviewed with Jack the next day.

After the interview, Jack wanted to employ her but said we probably would not hire her. She was looking more for a banker's position than one in manufacturing. Banking is more glamorous than this, he said, referring to the dusty plant. When we called her back for a second interview a week later, she stated exactly what Jack had predicted.

It was in 1988 that Rob was promoted to vice president of sales and marketing. I asked Jack about grooming Rob to take over someday. Jack made himself very clear: "I don't groom anyone. They groom themselves." I queried about Mr. Long and the time he served at ISC and Jack responded, "Mr. Long has been content to stay the manager of production. He is a very efficient manager of production." Jack expounded that Mr. Long viewed sales as a waste of time and money, as if new orders grew on trees and could be picked at any time. Maintenance was to stay out of sight until required and then fix problems in a blink of an eye.

Jack continued on Rob's ascent by mentioning he'd learned all facets of the company. He'd started in production, helped with maintenance and, when asked, he had done a superb job at sales. He'd acquired and maintained the OSHA, EPA, and IRS laws and protocols. Jack finished his commentary by saying, "Rob has always been there when I needed him. A good manager doesn't have to pick an employee for promotion—the employee steps forward."

Soon after Rob became VP, Mr. Peter Kerry Jr., the president of now-defunct Kerry Parts Company, a competitor, had an appointment with Rob and Jack and wanted to buy parts from us. They were manufacturing the parts for a GM car and now looking to outsource the work. Jack informed Mr. Kerry that Rob would make the arrangements concerning this part. The president

of Kerry Company said he didn't like working with "niggers." Jack coldly said, "We really don't have the capacity to handle any more business." The foul-mouthed man wanted to speak again, but Jack sternly stated, "Good day," ending the conversation.

After the "gentleman" left, Rob challenged Jack. "I thought it was you who said not to let your personal feelings get in the way of business."

Jack started to say something, then paused and said okay. "If you can get the business, you can have it. Be sure to get a premium because we'll be using old equipment and pushing overtime."

Rob struck a deal to produce the parts with the Kerry Company, and we made three monthly shipments. Payment was slow for the first three shipments, and we held the fourth until we received a check on the third shipment. Jack received a call from the Kerry Company and had me conference with Rob. It seemed they did not have the money to send us but needed that fourth shipment to complete the order. They asked if we would be willing to discount the shipment to get it off our docks and Jack emphatically said no.

Immediately after the phone call, Rob was waiting to see Jack. Jack asked me to take notes. Rob was curious as to how Jack had known Kerry would try to cheat us. Jack explained, "Once an asshole, always an asshole, and sometimes you should trust the hairs on the back of your neck. I have known of Mr. Kerry for ten years now and this only cements his unscrupulous reputation." Rob asked how ISC should resolve the box of completed parts waiting to ship. Jack smiled and pointed out that with the deal Rob had made, the first two checks covered most of our cost on the parts and we could afford to dump the fourth shipment on the open market and break even.

As 1989 started, Ol' Joe was talking retirement. He said it was getting old being there every day and that all the computerized machines were beyond his skills and abilities. Jack asked me what he should do, and I couldn't imagine Ol' Joe retiring, even though he was soon to be sixty-five years old. "Ol' Joe had worked for this company nearly forty-eight years.

"How do I commemorate an employee who's served that long at ISC?" Jack pondered aloud. I mentioned a gold watch was traditional, or if he wanted to be nontraditional, he could buy Ol' Joe a vacation package.

In February of 1989, Ol' Joe turned sixty-five and announced his retirement. Jack called Ol' Joe into his office and told him he wouldn't know what to do without him. Jack agreed to pay him one hundred dollars per week as a consulting fee, which left the door open for Ol' Joe to come back whenever he felt like it. Jack confided that everyone but Ol' Joe had pulled out of the company pension plan. With the modern times, the others had opted for a 401K plan. All funds remaining in the old pension plan must go to the name on the account, and the only name left on the account was Joseph Colachi. Ol' Joe was neither hot nor cold about the pension until he asked how much was in the account.

Jack had me read the amount, and the newly retired man stated, "Something is wrong. I can't take two hundred thousand dollars."

Jack piped up, “No one else can, because it has your name on it and if I take it, I’ll go to jail.” Ol’ Joe just mumbled something about an SOB and Jack came back with “For that much money, you’d think I could call you sir.” Ol’ Joe furnished a daring stare at Jack as if to say “try it and you will die.”

A couple of nights later, we had a dinner for Ol’ Joe’s retirement. Jack presented Ol’ Joe with a traditional gold watch. It was a Rolex with eleven diamond points marking eleven of the hours and a big diamond for the twelfth hour. Jack added, “In 1973, you loaned me money by not taking a paycheck. Now that you’re retiring, it’s time to repay you that loan. With interest, that comes out to be ten thousand dollars.”

Jack predicted to me at the retirement party, “Ol’ Joe will take a week, maybe two, and he will be back.” He did come back on a part-time basis, coming and going as he pleased, but always took Wednesdays off for golf.

Jack continued to groom Rob to take over someday. In the spring of 1991, there were many closed-door meetings between them. The first week of May, Jack investigated the future plans for my John and me because he heard my John was looking to retire. My John’s sixtieth birthday was coming, and he wanted to retire early and do some traveling. Jack said Katherine was graduating this year and Sarah was looking forward to a real vacation. Jack pictured a weekend in Vegas; Sarah was dreaming of sightseeing on a world cruise. After discussing my future, Jack hinted at many changes in June for ISC and its leadership.

On Monday in the second week of May, Sarah asked Jack to take her to the doctor’s office. Jack joked it was probably menopause or she was pregnant. Sarah had been feeling exhausted for the past month and wanted a full-body examination. The doctor’s appointment was early in the morning, and they were gone the entire day. On Wednesday morning, the doctor called and wanted to see both Jack and Sarah in his office.

“This morning?” Jack repeated, halfheartedly joking again that she must be pregnant. He wasn’t prepared to comprehend the doctor’s diagnosis. Later that day, Rob had an unusual problem and wanted Jack to confer with him. I barely started describing the problem when Jack told me, “Have Rob handle it,” with his voice cracking. Not hearing from Jack the rest of the week left the company feeling uneasy, but no one dared to call to disturb him.

We all knew something was wrong, but no one could have guessed what we heard on the following Monday. Jack called me at lunchtime and said to set up a manager’s meeting at four thirty. A lifeless Jack straggled in at four, acknowledging me as he dragged by my desk while proceeding to his office, where he met with Rob with the door closed. At four thirty, the two came out and started for the conference room. Jack turned towards me and in a small voice requested that I join them. Rob’s eyes were red and swollen, and his chin, which was usually high, had dropped to his chest as he somberly walked to the conference room.

The three of us arrived at the conference room and Jack made a point to seat Rob in the captain’s chair. Jack announced in the best voice he could muster, “Rob is president pro tem until further notice. Company bylaws require the president to be stockholder in the company. Many years

ago, Rob loaned the company money by foregoing a check at a critical time. It is time I repaid him, and by signing this document, Rob will own a total of twenty-five percent of Intricate Stamping Company.” With his hands shaking as if he had Parkinson’s Disease, Rob took the pen from Jack, and we all watched him sign his name, the room so quiet you could hear the pen scratching the table through the paper as Rob signed or initialed six times.

Jack took the paperwork, gave a copy to Rob and put the rest in his jacket pocket. He stood there for a moment to gather his thoughts with his hands clamped together in front of his waist. The veins on the back of his hands were bulging, and his knuckles and fingertips were a blistering red and white from the pressure. I looked at his neck and saw his Adam’s apple pulsating like a gobbling turkey neck. Jack’s face was drawn and without expression, and for the first time in thirty years, he could not find the words. He started to speak, stammered, coughed and started again in a slow and distinct manner, coercing each word out of his month with a crackle in each vowel.

“I am forced to take a leave of absence effective today. Rob will be in charge, with full authority in all aspects of Intricate Stamping Company. Last Wednesday, Sarah and I found out cancer has ravaged her body and she has six months to a year to live, and I plan to be with her the entire time.”

Jack swiftly left the conference room, touching my arm on the way out. I looked around at everyone and saw about twenty men and five women were fighting back tears. Long had buried his head in his elbow on the table, his shoulders flexing up as he tried to hold back his emotions. Rob sat uneasily in the captain’s chair, and tear-filled eyes with faces contorted from the extreme emotional response were all around me. I just stood there watching everyone, as I was not crying, was not upset, and felt very, very cold inside. The next thing I knew, Karen Colvin was wiping my eyes with a Kleenex and Tony was sliding a chair under me. Rob came over to me and held my hand, saying something, but all I could hear were Jack’s shattered words passing repeatedly through my head. Rob called my John to come pick me up and as I was leaving, there were other spouses showing to pick up loved ones.

The next day, there were abundant rumors concerning the meeting the day before and what was wrong with Jack. I was worried about Ol’ Joe and didn’t want him hearing the news from anyone else, so I called him at home. Jack had telephoned last Thursday and informed him of Sarah’s condition. Ol’ Joe would not be in that afternoon but would visit tomorrow. I mentioned the rumors and how the employees were wondering about the status of ISC. Rob went down and asked Tony to shut everything down and gather the employees. Rob tried his best to clarify the status of ISC and the news Jack had conveyed the afternoon before. As Rob choked on the words coming out of his mouth, Long had to finish for Rob, and almost everyone present had teary eyes.

The following Monday morning, Jack brought Sarah for a final visit. Sitting in Jack’s office, she allowed the office personnel to visit her. She had to agree to these conditions before Jack would let her visit, and she was in good spirits. Jack wanted to know why Rob hadn’t rearranged the president’s office. Rob shrugged his shoulders and Jack expounded, “We’ve been planning a

change for June, and you know what to do.” Jack gathered up a few mementos and then told Rob, “Bring anything that doesn’t fit to the house.”

After the office staff had visited Sarah, one special person came from the shop. Ol’ Joe peeked his head in the door and asked if it was okay for him to enter. Sarah wanted to know why he hadn’t called on her at the house, and Ol’ Joe responded, “This is a time for family.”

Sarah gave him a puppy dog look and said, “You powdered my behind. If that’s not family, what is?” Ol’ Joe’s crusty demeanor softened, and Jack left to two alone in the office.

At the behest of Sarah, Ol’ Joe announced to Jack, who thought he was in charge, “I am going to carry Sarah to the plant.” Jack drew a deep breath, held it for a good minute, and then sighed all resistance out—he was outnumbered. He agreed to let her go to the plant and sit in a chair for everyone to pay his or her respects. Ol’ Joe called a couple of the people and they took a big comfortable lounge chair from the foyer out to the shop, with Jack taking Sarah by the arm and escorting her to the plant for a final visit. All the employees anxiously lined up to greet her and Ol’ Joe kept the line moving.

The very last person through the line to greet Sarah was Terrell and as he tried to say hi, only tears came out. No one else touched her, but when Sarah saw Terrell crying, she reached up and grabbed his trembling hand and held it. Sarah joked, “You big macho types are all the same—tough as a cookie on the outside and marshmallow on the inside.”

Jack and Rob were talking quietly off to the side, and Tony asked Ol’ Joe to inspect a press machine and give his advice. This left me watching over Sarah. This was her moment alone with the plant, and she gazed wondrously all around at the different sights. In that moment, I could see in her face: the little girl in pigtails trying to keep up with Daddy, the teenager spying a strong young man celebrating a success, and the back wall torn down for double the size of the plant. For the first time today, she had a tear in her eye and looked anemic.

When we got back to the offices, Jack pulled me into his old office after asking Rob if he could use it. He might not be back to the company, and Rob would like me to help him for a couple of months so he could be acclimated to the new job. Then either I would have the choice to retire, or Rob would find another position for me. I told Jack that my John was retiring in a couple of months and we were planning to travel.

“Please assist Rob until retirement,” he pleaded with me.

After Jack and Sarah left, Rob had Long report and told him, “As of today, you are vice president. Clean out your office in the shop and move everything to my old office on this floor. What is your opinion of having Tony fill your office in the plant?”

Mr. Long liked Tony as a manager but commented he didn’t think Rob and Tony saw eye to eye.

“We don’t, but that doesn’t mean he’s not a good promotion to plant manager,” replied Rob. Rob went around making the changes as discussed with Jack, preparing for this moment. Karen officially became personnel manager, an easy move as she had always attended management meetings.

When we completed our rounds of the office, Rob asked me if Elaine in payroll was ready for a full-time secretary's job. We stopped and talked to Elaine, who agreed to become a full-time secretary.

Next, we all traveled to Tony's office, which was no more than a cubicle in the corner of the plant. Looking at Tony, Rob said, "I'm the new president. Clear your desk out." Tony's face went blank, and after pausing for a moment, Rob continued, "Elaine is your new secretary, and she will help you move to your new office." We all laughed until someone mentioned Jack and then the moment went silent.

The first week of June was my first opportunity to visit Jack and Sarah at home. Sarah was looking good, but Jack was losing the middle-aged bulge from around his waist. Noticing a vial of painkillers on the nightstand next to her, I asked Sarah if she was in pain. Although she said no, Sarah grimaced a couple of times while visiting. My visit was an hour long and Katherine joined us in conversation for a little while. Coming out of Sarah's room, I found Jack sleeping on a couch just outside Sarah's door; Sarah had advised me not to wake him since he had not been sleeping well.

In July, Sarah was looking very thin and had an IV to her hand from a machine dispensing narcotics on a regular basis. Sarah wanted Jack to partake of some of her drowsy medicine to make him sleep. Sarah looked as if she'd lost twenty pounds and Jack, looking gaunt, had lost thirty to forty. Entering the room, Katherine asked if I would persuade her dad to eat a full meal.

"I'll assign Ol' Joe to the task, and he'll make your dad eat" was my hopeful reply.

Ol' Joe reported to me a couple days later that Jack had left the house and eaten a good lunch. After that, Ol' Joe, Rob, and I took turns meeting with Jack and encouraging him to eat and get out for a while. Seeing Jack coping with life and eating made Sarah happy.

On September 4, it was my turn to remove Jack from the house, take him for lunch and make him eat. While Sarah was awake and alert and seemed in good spirits for her frail condition, Jack would not leave her side. When he phoned me later that day, his only words were "It's over," and there was a long pause before I could answer him.

Ol' Joe handled the details of Sarah's funeral and arranged for Mr. Sterling to attend the service. On Jack's forty-eighth birthday, the undertaker laid Sarah to rest.

My John and I invited Jack for dinner at least once a week when we weren't traveling. As the holidays approached, I noticed Jack getting a little depressed. Jack was showing a brave demeanor, but you could observe the anxiety of life in his words and on his face. Katherine was getting ready for her first semester of college because she had skipped the fall classes with her mother's passing away. When I suggested that Jack attend college, he looked at me as if I'd suggested he go to the moon, then smiled and said he might do that.

Jack drove Katherine to college in January and we saw less of Jack as time passed. I realized Jack had not been to church since Sarah's cancer diagnosis. I sent him an invitation to go to church with us, but he said with a smile on his face that it wasn't time yet. In June of that year,

Jack requested that I help him apply to college, since it had been my idea, although Jack had mentioned on a regular basis that his only regret was not being able to get a college education. He registered at a local college and started classes in the fall, a year after Sarah had passed away. I noticed Jack had gained most of the weight he'd lost when caring for Sarah, and I knew he would be all right.

Jack always stayed in touch with my John and me, but sometimes it was difficult due to the traveling we were doing and the schedule Jack kept. Jack got involved in civic organizations to help the community. I asked him to go with us on a trip, and Jack simply said, "There is nothing finer out there than what I can find in this town." It was Sarah's overwhelming memory that kept him close to home. I would check in on ISC occasionally and learned that Rob was taking the company to new industries while Jack was consulting on a regular basis. ISC was completely out of the automotive industry.

About two years before Jack passed away, he started attending church again. In his younger days, Jack had been very somber at church, but recently I noticed him crying and being more vocal during the service.

My John and I left for Florida the day after Easter in April of 2002. We were enjoying the sunshine and the company of some friends we'd met on our travels. They owned a condominium in the Keys, and we rented a unit from their association. We had been there ten beautiful days when we got a call from our daughter telling us that Jack had passed away. I dropped the phone upon hearing the news, and we caught the next plane leaving for Ohio.

Jack was the best manager an employee could have, and he was a better friend to me. If I were to have been unfaithful to my John, Jack was the only possibility. I can say this without my John getting jealous because what attracted me to Jack is the very thing that would keep us apart. Jack was a man who truly kept his word; if Jack told you that he would do something, he did it. When he committed to Sarah, it was nonnegotiable.

In the early nineties, my John and I were having marital issues and I went to Jack for comfort. Instead of reassurance, he gave me wanted advice and worldly wisdom. He pointed out that when other couples reached this point in life, the wife tended to baby the husband, and husbands weren't used to the attention. He also pointed out husbands tended not to see the changing interests of their wife. Men should see the changes, since they were apparent, but men could be thick-headed. He suggested I speak to my husband as a wife and not a mother. Jack always seemed to express the right words for every situation. It wasn't so much the words he used but how he expressed them that made the difference.

My John and I will miss Jack, and the only other time I had seen my John cry was when his father had died. Our community has lost by the departure of Jack. Rob put a memorial in the lobby of Intricate Stamping Company that listed the past two presidents, with Jack's name in gold.

Chapter 2 by Katherine (Brown) Williams

Jack's Daughter

John “Jack” Brown was my dad. I have always called him Dad and will remember him as Dad. Fathers can be anything, but dads are always loving, tender and sensitive even when they’re angry with you. No matter how angry Dad got or how much I disappointed him, a simple “LuvYa” would calm him down. His down-to-earth smile would transform my unpleasant mood and lift me from my doldrums. His irresistible smile was infectious, while his love for Mom and me was genuine.

My first authentic recollection of my dad was when I was four years old and his little girl. He traveled out of town on business for a miserable week, and I missed him terribly. Mom tried to comfort me while he was gone, but it was his cheery phone calls every night that helped me through the week. He arrived home early at midday on Thursday, and I still like to think it was for me alone. Until I was sixteen, every Christmas, Mom and I remained at the top steps, waiting for him to set up. He would plug in the colorful Christmas lights on the tree and start filming on the movie camera. He always got a shot of Mom and me in our pajamas parading down the steps and into the family room. He would place the camera on a tripod and film everyone enjoying the events of that glorious morning.

When I was eight years old, Mom entered me in a coed soccer league in town to drain some of my energy. The newly formed league boasted six teams for boys and girls ages eight to ten, and our coach was Ms. White. Her distinctive motto, “Winning is not important, it’s how we play the game” still critically resonates with me today.

After we lost our first four games by wide margins, I wanted to quit before the season was half over. Dad stated in his confident tone of voice, “The Browns don’t quit something they started.”

At the next practice when Dad and I showed up, all the other kids had their uniforms in a pile because everyone was quitting. Dad insisted this act was understandable but was setting a bad precedent for the kids in the years to come. White couldn’t understand why every child wanted to quit; after all, she was having fun. It turns out that winning is an important part of the game and the lack of winning was the reason for me to quit. Dad questioned White as to why we were not winning, and a disgruntled White told him he didn’t understand little kids.

Dad gave Ms. White his emotionless stare and coldly stated, “I understand my daughter’s quitting because she hates losing.”

When my friends' fathers became angry, they would scream and shout in a pitched voice with their faces turning red. When Dad became irritated, especially with me, he turned cold and spoke calmly but sternly. My girlfriends said his cold unemotional intention scared them more than their fathers yelling.

Ms. White’s face turned pallid at Dad’s direct comment and his demanding stare. In the frustration of the moment, she retorted, “If you can do better, then you coach.”

Dad turned to my teammates gathered around their uniforms and asked if they would play if there were a chance of winning. All but one girl said yes to the possible victory Dad expressed, and the one girl did not like the game.

Dad became the temporary coach for our wayward soccer team for the next three years. We finished the season with four sad losses but more importantly four joyous wins. The second year, with Dad coaching the team, we won all but two games and were champions of the league. In Dad's third year as head coach of our mighty team, we were undefeated and beat the all-boy team twice.

For the most part, Dad was like a big lion you see on television on the African safari shows. When everything was satisfactory, he was calm and lighthearted. When I found everyday trouble, Mom would handle my punishment while Dad stayed back. When the trouble reached the terrible level, then Dad issued me a befitting punishment. I could argue with Mom, especially in my teenage years, but with Dad, there was no arguing. Dad would sit me down and ask me questions as to the offense committed and expected quick and truthful responses.

I remember playing with a toy and Dad asked me a question in his mad voice. Without thinking, I told him something that was untrue. He stomped my toy, smashing it into pieces, and asked me if I would like to lose another toy. I sat straight up, then told him the absolute truth and never thought about lying to him again. That was the solitary feature my dad did not tolerate, to have anyone lie to him. He grounded me for a week for what I did; I lost a toy and missed my best friend's birthday party for lying to him.

At age twelve, I acquired my first boyfriend while in sixth grade, and the relationship lasted Thursday and Friday. Saturday morning, my best friend, Susie Drennan, called and said she heard the boy liked someone else. After making a few more calls, I learned the devastating news was true and my world came crashing down all around me. I went searching for Mom to comfort me over this demoralizing newsflash. She was shopping, and Dad inquired about what was wrong as I burst into tears and ran into my bedroom to be alone.

Dad instinctively followed me to my bedroom and probed, "What's wrong?"

I sobbed, "I want Mom."

"Your mother is shopping and will not be returning for a while" was his confused reply. He stood there for a moment with a bewildered look on his face and then asked, "Is it female problems?"

I tried my best to explain between the tears running down my face what had happened that morning. He asked if I kissed the boy during the courtship and there was a resounding no rumbled at him.

"Good, I would have made you marry him if you had kissed him," Dad said with a completely straight face.

I unburied my face from the pillow and glanced at him from the corner of my eye while the corners of his mouth slightly turned up. Then he smiled at me with those sparkling blue eyes and

I couldn't help smiling back at him. When he smiled ear to ear, even his eyes were smiling, warming my heart and curing my distress. We had an intense discussion about boys for over an hour. He reported that boys were stupid and didn't become interested in girls for another year. Until the boy grew up to be a man, he was fickle about girls, many times choosing sports over girls.

Mom arrived home later that day, and as we put away the groceries, we spoke about what had happened that morning. She explained that my sudden outburst scared Dad that morning because he didn't understand my emotional response. I wanted to talk with her about boys, but instead we talked mostly about the relationship between her and Dad. Between my parents' imparted wisdom, it all seemed to make sense, and by Monday, there was a new boy to break my heart. I found out that enlightened Saturday there were no subjects I could not broach to my parents, with the possible exception of "female problems" with Dad.

I started junior high in the fall of 1985, and algebra was the required math. The letters with numbers in the problems from the book proved too hard for me to comprehend. Naturally, I went to Mom, requesting her help because she had the college degree. She declared her diploma was in political science and math was not her strength. I inherited Mom's math skills and would ask Dad for help since he used math every day. I would much rather have Mom help me with challenging homework than Dad. Mom gave me some of the answers, then helped me figure out a few more and left me to my own to determine the rest. Dad, on the other hand, would carefully examine the problem, thoroughly helping me understand each step. That I learned more algebra through Dad's teaching method than Mom's was easy to admit. It seemed every night, there was Dad helping me with my homework and taking me to the next level, never giving me the answer but always seeming to point in the right direction. By the end of the school year, I really didn't need his help anymore, but it made him feel good to help me.

The eighth grade required new clothes for the new school year, and shopping at the mall was the best. As we were leaving for the mall, Mom came down with a headache and Dad was willing to take me shopping. What Mom didn't know was that my biggest need for the new school year was better-fitting underwear. Instead of the mall, we shopped in the department store in town and quickly found the teen section. We browsed dresses, pants, and shirts hanging from many racks, and while most of Dad's selections were nice, I laughed off a few. He held up a garish dress with bright printed flowers and said, "You'll look just like Grandma."

We both laughed. After the good laugh, I exposed to him my biggest need to shop that night, namely new bras. He stood there for a moment with a perplexed stare on his face, and it was obvious he wasn't ready to go underwear shopping with his daughter. For a second, I thought he was going to make an excuse to get out of it, but with a halfhearted grin, he said, "Let's go see what they have."

The first bra he selected was a training bra, which I had outgrown at age eleven. He started to say, "This is a nice one," then he noticed I had boobs. Mom wore an average C cup and by age thirteen, I was bigger than she was, looking for a D cup. It became apparent he'd never noticed how developed I was until that very moment. Before reaching the women's section, it became

clear to me he was uncomfortable helping me find a bra. As the sweat beaded on his forehead, he tried his best to help me pick out the bra that best fit me. Jokingly I asked him if I should try one on and show it to him; he just glared at me while I laughed, then he tried to laugh too. I saw a thong on display and thought about asking for it, but I figured he would pass out at that point.

Upon our arrival at home, Dad took some aspirin and went to straight to bed. As soon as he was out of sight, whatever was ailing Mom seemed to vanish without a trace, and she announced, "Let's see what you bought."

I opened the bag and showed her the bras and panties I'd purchased that evening with Dad. Mom cried out, "I thought you were buying clothes," looking astonished while trying to keep a straight face. Mom explained that Dad had proclaimed he knew his daughter and would be able to pick out clothes she would like. The intention of shopping with me tonight was to choose clothes I liked and would wear. I described to Mom how embarrassed Dad had been picking out bras for his daughter but emphasized that Dad had stuck around to the end and asked the appropriate questions about size and style. I would have been embarrassed if it hadn't been for Dad's extreme embarrassment. In Dad's defense, I informed Mom he was selecting clothes in popular styles that I liked and would wear.

Occasionally, Dad enjoyed driving me to school in the morning so we could talk along the way. We only lived about ten minutes from school, but it always took us a half hour to get there when he drove. That morning, he inquired how I was adjusting to the eighth-grade schedule and teachers. As I was exiting the car, he said the usual "LuvYa" and I returned the same sappy reply. Some other girls heard him say it and gave me a tough time all day, mocking our special goodbye to each other. The very next day he made it a point to drive me to school again, and we arrived early. When leaving the car he whispered, "L-Y." I knew what he meant and treasured it throughout the day.

1989 saw my sixteenth birthday, and I looked forward to my driver's license. Upon hearing of my yearning to drive, Dad announced driving was a man's domain and he would teach me to drive. This made me feel better, not because of his antiquated outburst but because Mom's ability to drive scared me. Mom was very talented, with many achievements in life, but driving was not one of them. I think it must have had to do with the changing eras, because when she was young, women didn't drive much. In the sixties, driving was a man's specialty, but nowadays girls drove as much as the boys did.

Dad started teaching me to drive with three training runs through empty parking lots. I had to learn how to parallel park even though it wasn't required on the driving test. After I mastered the empty parking lot, he took me out on city streets for the first time. After several slow excursions down quiet streets, I was comfortable behind the wheel and found driving was fun.

As my training entered the busy city streets, I asked Dad when he was going to get me my own car. His matter-of-fact reply was, "I will get a new car at the same age your grandfather got your mother her own car."

Upon arriving at home, I exclaimed in my excitement that Dad was buying me my own car. With a puzzled look on her face, Mom asked if Dad had actually said he was purchasing me a car. I told her, “Dad said he would buy me a car at the same age Grandpa bought you your first car.”

With a cunning smile on her face, Mom said, “To this point in my life, your grandpa has never bought me a car.” Dad, being a man of his word, knew if I wanted a car, I must get a job and buy my own. His trickery completely fooled me, but I will do the same to my kids.

In the latter part of my junior year, I slept over at Susie’s house on a Saturday night. Mom and Dad presumed Susie’s parents were supervising our sleepover in their home. As it turned out, at five o’clock, they got tickets to a show in Cleveland and left the two of us home alone. We were not expecting her parents back until well after midnight and went looking for mischief. We brainstormed the bright idea of sneaking into her dad’s liquor cabinet. We carefully poured a drink into a couple of tall glasses and filled the bottle with water back to the original volume. On the third drink, we drunkenly forgot to add water back into the bottle to cover our wrongdoings. We were lounging in the living room with drinks in hand when her parents came home and exploded at the sight of two sixteen-year-old girls having a nightcap at their expense.

Susie’s father was yelling while her mother was screaming at the sight of two drunken fools barely able to stand. For the first time in my short life, I knew the difference between a yell and a scream. Susie’s dad phoned my dad and informed him of the evening’s events involving free whiskey. Susie lived two houses away from ours, and I watched the clock on the wall, waiting for Dad to come get me. Having heard of time standing still, it was at that very moment I realized it could happen. The second hand would stop for an eternity before moving to the next second. It took exactly two minutes and thirty-two seconds for Dad to get dressed and come secure me. It seemed like a lifetime, and I started picturing myself at a military school or maybe a convent. One of Dad’s axioms was that I didn’t know what it was like to be in the doghouse, and I pictured myself living in a doghouse in the backyard. Between the alcohol, the late hour, and the fear of my parents and what they would say, I was left terrified.

There was a stern knock on the door, which indicated Dad had chased after me, because Mom would not have knocked. This gave me hope because between Mom and Dad, I thought Dad was less likely to kill me on the way home. Dad shook Mr. Drennan’s hand, glared at me with very cold blue eyes and unsympathetically verbalized, “Let’s go.” I didn’t say a word all the way home, which was quite difficult in my stupor, but somehow, I knew not to say anything.

When we arrived home after midnight, Mom demanded to know what was happening, and Dad said, “Smell her breath.”

Mom stopped about a foot away from me and in a shrill never-heard-before voice screeched, “What the hell have you been doing?”

I’d never heard Mom swear in my short sixteen year of life, and this shocked me into reality. Dad would cuss like a millwright when in the garage or at work, but Mom abhorred swearing.

I muttered, “We had a drink.”

Mom, mad as a wet hornet, shrieked, “A drink? you smell like a distillery.” Mom’s anger turning to frustration, she ordered me upstairs and declared they would see me in a little bit.

It seemed as if a half hour passed, and I was having trouble keeping my eyes open as the alcohol played with my mind. When Dad suddenly appeared at the open door, the realization that I was not ready for bed struck fear in me again. Dad stood there for a moment, then turned and walked away. I hurriedly changed into my pajamas and waited a while longer.

Mom, having had a moment to calm down, came up to my room and said, “You did change. We will see you in the morning.”

It was 4:00 a.m. when I woke from my inebriated slumber. It had been almost one in the morning when my aggravated mom had said she’d “see me in the morning.” For the first time that night, the full impact of my actions was clear in my head, as was my parents’ reaction to it. The realization that Mom’s cussing at me meant she was madder than ever before. Even Dad, with all his antics, couldn’t make her mad enough to cuss, and in one night, I had. Then I pondered Dad’s reaction to my drinking prematurely. He wasn’t angry but seemed more upset, disappointed, and hurt by my actions the night before. It was about that time that the noise of television downstairs drifted through the silent house.

Upon investigating, I found Dad sitting glassy-eyed in front of the TV, switching channels without care for any of them. I watched him mindlessly skim through the channels one by one until it started over. I moved so he could more easily see me, and the channels kept changing without care. Dead silence was something I’d never experienced from him before. He wouldn’t even make eye contact in his demoralized state of consciousness.

After I moved directly in front of him smiled and said “LuvYa” he raised his right arm for me to crawl under it. I snuggled next to his firm chest as I had done as a small child. We sat there for a moment and I felt him hold me tight around the shoulders. Then his arm moved up and clenched my head, and with the point of his hard knuckles, he gave me some noogies. When I was younger and did something stupid, he would do this to me until Mom caught him one day and told him never to do it again.

My head was throbbing but did not hurt after the application of noogies, then he asked me what I had been thinking the night before. Normally, Dad would expect short answers to his questions, and I knew at this moment complete honesty was of the utmost importance. I also knew if my only answer was “I don’t know,” it would get me more noogies atop my head.

Trying to give it my best spin while telling the whole truth, I explained, “Susie and I thought it would be cool if we tried a drink. We started our third drink when Mr. and Mrs. Drennan came home and caught us with the adult beverages in hand.” I did my best to explain our full motivation for pouring the wicked solution.

He explained that the booze is an inanimate object, which is neither good nor bad. For something to be good or bad, it must have a soul and have eaten from the tree of good and evil.

I replied, “Sixteen-year-old girls know that drinking is evil, therefore I am evil for drinking.”

“Not quite,” he continued. “Your immoral actions were incorrect, but it does not make you evil. There has been only one perfect man on this Earth. Everyone else is a sinner. Realizing your actions were wrong, taking steps to correct the situation, and trying not to do it again are what makes you good.”

“Does this mean I avoid grounding?” I asked as I smiled at him and he gave me his I-had-better-be-joking look.

Then he pronounced a week of grounding to the house and a month without my license was suitable punishment. He paused and added, “If your story checks out with Mr. Drennan’s, you may go to the dance on Friday.” Shock must have run over my face because he added, “You thought I forgot about that.”

Then I asked why he was so distressed last night and he peered at me as if I was stupid. I qualified my ridiculous question by saying, “You are still up at this hour.”

Firstly, he stated, “What do you say to a sixteen-year-old the first time she’s caught drinking?”

I did not know what to say.

“I had nights where there were too many drinks and know how easy it is to lose control when you are young and drinking. Sometime in your life, you must realize if you do not control your drinking then it will control you. Secondly, what your foolhardy actions did to your mother has me in a quandary. Your mother has never been that disturbed to cuss, and I’ve tried in the past to get her that furious.”

I added that Mom would have given me noogies with a baseball bat last night.

The next morning, Dad woke me up at 7:00 a.m., stating if I was going to drink like a grown-up, I would have to pay the price as a grown-up. The meaning of his obscure pronouncement remained a mystery until I tried to move. There was an enormous weight pressing on my head, keeping it glued to the pillow. I thought my hair caught on something, but then the reality of the morning light struck me; it was just my head not wanting to move. It took a while for me to come downstairs as every part of my body felt stiff and hard to move. Dad had a buffet breakfast spread across the table for me, including pancakes, sausage, toast, and eggs. Mom and Dad had been in a heated discussion before I dragged myself to the kitchen. Dad announced that a hearty breakfast was the best cure for a night of drinking and cavorting. I methodically sat at the table and Dad pushed aromatic food under my nose. Normally, it was an honor to receive this attention from Dad. But as the aroma from the various foods wafted over me, my stomach started doing flip-flops. I was forcing a couple mouthfuls of breakfast down my throat when I looked up at Dad, who was nudging Mom and smiling. He seemed to get immense joy out of seeing me suffer from the lingering effects from the night before. I must have looked pitiful, because Mom, who hadn’t said two words to me all morning, looked at me and started laughing too. She asked if I would like some coffee as I began to wonder where the clearness I’d felt at 4:00 a.m. had gone. Now there was fuzzy buzzing in my head and I was having trouble maintaining any coherent thoughts.

I'd hoped to stay home from church, but Dad said, "Nothing doing." If I was drinking like an adult, I had to go to church as an adult. By the time we made it to church, the buzzing in my head turned to a headache and thought of sleeping filled my mind. The preacher was especially loud that morning, with each word seeming to resonate in my head, and when the preacher was resolute, my whole body flexed. After church Mom suggested letting me sleep, but Dad insisted I had chores to do; it was part of my punishment. By three that afternoon, I was wishing for parents who would beat me silly rather than having to go through Dad's punishment.

At about eight that night, Mom had snuck me some aspirin and I was starting to feel a little better. They were sitting together on the couch discussing me as if I'd already gone to bed. Mom was thinking my escapades from the night before should preclude me from going to the dance on Friday. Dad explained my story rang true with Drennan's, and for being honest about what happen, he thought I should go. They compromised. I could go, and Dad would drive me there at eight and pick me up at ten thirty when it was over. Mom admitted Dad's punishment suited the offense better than what she had in mind. Dad replied, "You may know your daughter better than me, but I know the effects of drinking better than you." I never did find out what Mom had in store for me, but it could not have been worse than what Dad did to me.

High school went by fast, with boyfriends coming and going, but none of them broke my heart the way the first boy had broken it. It didn't matter who the boy was, if they wanted to date me, they had to meet Dad first. I started dating Mike Utica in late October my senior year, and when he came to pick me up for the first time, Dad, Ol' Uncle Joe, and Uncle Terrell were in the den. I felt bad for Mike for having to deal with the three stubborn men, but Mom was delaying me. By the time I got downstairs, Mike was waiting by the door and we went to dinner and a movie. There wasn't a lot of conversation during the date, and at the completion of the movie, he drove me home.

The silence of the date gave me the impression Mike didn't like me, and he didn't try to kiss me at the door. When I called Susie early the next morning to ask her if she'd heard anything, she said, "He likes you well enough, but your dad and friends scared him." I mentioned to Susie the three were harmless, and Susie said the shotguns they were holding weren't harmless.

As the shock and horror of this news penetrated my heart, I found Mom in the kitchen and told her what had happened the night before. Mike's bizarre first impression of Dad sincerely annoyed Mom, and she told me to wait in the kitchen while she scolded him. I could hear Mom yelling at Dad from the kitchen and Dad saying they had gone hunting that morning.

"Did you have to point the gun?" Mom demanded, knowing the answer.

The shotguns were empty and no one had pointed the gun at the young man was the composed reply. As the discussion continued, I could hear less and less of the conversation, and after a while, they were whispering to each other. Mom, returning to the kitchen, trying not to smile, said Dad was sorry for scaring the boy and ruining our date. If I would give Dad the boy's phone number, he would call to make amends and get me a first-rate date with the boy. I did not give the number to Dad, but I did go out with Mike again the following Friday. Looking back on the

situation, I realize Dad was right again. If a boy is going to like you, it doesn't matter what you look like or how strange your family is.

We dated occasionally until Christmas, when he bought me a promise ring and gave it to me on Christmas Eve. Mom noticed the ring as soon as I came through the door and followed me upstairs with excitement over the latest development. We talked about the ring and dating for an hour before I went downstairs to show Dad. I wiggled my finger all around while talking with Dad, but he didn't notice the amazing ring of a committed boyfriend. Very frustrated by Dad's inability to notice an important event, I finally asked him what he thought of the ring.

He pulled his reading glasses down on his nose and gazed at it, saying, "It looks nice, but if I find out that you've been kissing him, I'll make you marry him."

I don't know why, but I ran away crying at his careless comment. Mom was standing at the doorway to the den when I whooshed past her and soared up the steps to my room. I remember her voice was stern and uncompromising as she lectured him. Within a couple minutes, Dad was in my room. With my head buried in the pillow, I could hear him walk closer to me.

Placing his calloused hand on my shoulder and didn't moving it, he asked me, "What I should say to my only daughter who is growing up? I guess my old joke didn't go over well."

I wanted to stay angry with him, so I kept my head buried in the pillow.

He continued slowly and distinctly, "It a very nice ring, and I think you and Mike make a cute couple. If you would like, invite him for Christmas dinner."

And then I made the mistake at looking at him. His infectious smile melted my sorrowful heart and the anger left me in a hurry. Mom confided in me later he knew I had gotten the ring because he'd heard us in the hallway "cackling" about it.

Mike and I dated the rest of the school year and became everyone's favorite couple. It was May when Susie and I were with some friends, eating lunch over a conversation about prom and graduating high school. Susie mentioned in a sudden change of subject, "You've never been called to the principal's office" and I quipped that I'd never been caught.

Then on cue, over the loudspeaker, we heard "Katherine Brown to the principal's office."

"See there? It happened," I shouted, and everyone cheered as I left for the principal's office in a victory dance.

I arrived at the office to see the principal holding my dad's shoulder and shaking his hand. When Dad turned to me with his melancholy blue eyes, the look on his face sent shivers down my back. Without saying a word, he came over and hugged me tightly and passionately. My first thought was that Grandpa died, because Grandma had passed away a year earlier and he was not well. Dad took me by the hand and led me to the car as I felt the trembling of his heart in my hand. Mom, sitting placid in passenger seat, had a stunned look on her face, which scared me even more. Dad tried to speak, then started the car, and I heard Dad sniffing and gagging all the way home.

We reached our white concrete drive when Mom spoke with an unnerving quality to her voice. They had just returned from the doctor's office, where they'd learned the test she had taken on Monday had come back positive for cancer. This cancer had appeared in most of her body, and they were going to the oncologist this afternoon. She explained that I was a big part of this family and should be there with them for moral support and peace of mind. At seventeen, a young person is looking for adults to recognize them as grown-up, but this time I wished they had not. Dad stopped the car short of the house, opened my door, crawled in the back with me, and held me tight, and I cannot remember when he'd held me tighter. The next thing I knew, Mom was in the back seat with us and we cried together for almost half an hour. Dad was the first one to compose himself from our sobbing state and managed to get us all in the house, then talked at the table over coffee.

Dad said it was my decision to go with them to the oncologist or wait for their return to hear the possibilities. When I asked about the current prognosis, Mom shook her head, and Dad explained the doctor had said it was very bleak.

"What does very bleak mean?" I demanded in an uncompromising and exacting voice.

Dad continued to explain that the cancer affected too many parts of Mom's body. It was the doctor's opinion that chemotherapy would only delay the inevitable. He had given them the name of a good oncologist who would be able to tell them more and made them a 3:00 p.m. appointment.

When the phone rang, Dad instinctively picked it up, and through the tears in eyes, I heard him say, "Let Rob handle it." The seriousness of the situation really hit home because Dad would always answer questions.

When we arrived at the oncologist's office in Cleveland, the doctor promptly showed. He explained the test results had just arrived at his desk and he would like some time to review them. It was about an hour and a half when he returned. After consulting with other doctors and calling to verify the validity of the test, he must concur with our doctor. The outlook was bleak. He opened a folder and pulled out the images from the MRI Mom had undergone on Monday. They showed dark blotches on the liver, kidneys and pancreas that the doctor indicated were growths. The biopsy from Monday tested to be cancerous. Furthermore, the lymph nodes tested all showed cancerous growths. At this time, Mom's lungs were clear, but the doctor indicated this would not last long and they too would start to fail. With chemotherapy, Mom would have at least six months maybe a year of life left to share with us. He would like to run his own test in the morning and would have more precise answers for us. The three of us discussed the situation and agreed Mom should have further testing. Mom asked how long she would have if she did not get treatment, and the doctor lamented four to six months. The doctor would have her admitted to the hospital and would have the test done early morning.

We stayed in the examination room until the nurses were ready for Mom. She asked our opinion about foregoing chemo, since she had witnessed the treatment's ill effects on a patient and really did not want that life. Dad remained strangely quiet while Mom and I deliberated the subject. I asked Dad his thoughts regarding the chemotherapy and he replied, "Let's wait until tomorrow."

We wanted to help Mom to the hospital room, but the nurse asked if they could settle her in her room first. Mom encouraged Dad and me to find something to eat while the hospital admitted her. As I tried to talk with Dad over dinner regarding Mom, he finally snapped at me not to talk with my mouth full. Dad enjoyed talking during meals because mealtimes were for enjoyment, sharing thoughts and bonding. Tonight, the meal was something necessary to survive.

When we arrived at Mom's room an hour before visiting hours ended, Dad handed me the keys to his car and told me to come back in the morning. No one had ever driven Dad's Town Car before, and without a thought, he gave me the keys. He was sleeping in the lobby, but he wasn't leaving, and then the nurse mentioned the hotel across the street would give us a discount if we mentioned our situation. Mom would be having a test until 9:00 a.m., and we would be able to visit after she returned.

Dad and I walked over to the hotel, and the manager said they had no rooms available. Dad informed the manager that Mom was at the cancer ward across the street for testing. The sympathetic manager leafed through some papers on the counter and searched the computer to find a room. There was one double bed suite available in an hour, if we cared to share, and Dad confirmed we'd take the room.

The maid was still cleaning the room with two full-sized beds upon our arrival. I lay on the bed closer to the window while Dad sat uncomfortably in the chair at the desk. After resting a couple minutes, Dad excused himself and left the room. A few minutes later, he returned with toothbrushes and paste as I was in bed fully clothed. Dad announced he was going to get a drink, and I asked if he would like company. He smiled and waved for me to come. As he sipped his cocktail, we examined the problems we'd encountered that day.

"What do you think of Mom not taking chemo?" he queried with a heavy heart. I divulged my innermost thoughts on the subject. When we finished talking, we agreed that we would understand if Mom wanted to forego chemotherapy. Dad thanked me for supporting him in this dreadful situation, and I thanked him for treating me as an adult.

The next morning, I awoke to an empty room. I was brushing my teeth in the bathroom when the room door opened, and Dad stated the obvious. "I guess we didn't plan this trip very well," he said, producing a large white bag with handles. He'd purchased a shirt, pants and clean underwear for me, and it fit comfortably, even the bra. The hotel store only had designer clothing, and Dad looked sharp in his silk shirt and pleated pants. Mom was pleasantly surprised to see us in fashionable new clothes when we were finally able to see her. Her surprise turned to astonishment when she discovered Dad had picked out my stylish outfit. Dad modeled his designer clothes for Mom, using the space in front of her bed as a runway.

The mood in the hospital room was cheerful when the doctor showed up just before lunch. The doctor explained that his test confirmed the results from back home and asked about starting chemotherapy. Mom asked again, "What is the difference between getting the chemotherapy and not having it?"

The doctor deliberated his answer carefully for a moment and then said that, with therapy, she'd have six months to a year with less than one percent chance of survival; without chemo, four to six months. Dad and I both looked at Mom, waiting for her response, and she reiterated the effect chemo had on other people. If there were a chance of surviving the cancer, she would go through chemotherapy. "But I really don't want to finish my life going through the side effects of chemo," she anguished. The doctor prescribed a pain reliever and sent a pain killing regimen to our doctor for the duration of Mom's struggle.

The doctor released Mom by the end of lunch so she could return home in the afternoon. There was an upscale restaurant in downtown Cleveland that Mom liked, and she asked if we could dine there. Dad, showing concern, asked Mom how she felt and she humorously replied, "With my hands."

I hadn't been to this restaurant but go back every year on that date in memory of Mom. We all spent a long family weekend together, and Sunday night, Mom took one of her prescribed pain pills. She said the effect of the pill was overkill for the pain she was feeling.

Dad drove me to school on the rainy Monday and went after Grandpa so he could visit with Mom. Dad promptly picked me up from school, and on the drive home, he informed me of the afternoon plans. He was going into work to explain the situation with Mom and would not be in again until after Mom was gone. The finality of his statement left a huge lump in my throat as the realization of the situation hit my heart. Upon arriving at home, I found an old couch strategically placed in the hall just outside the guest room. Peeking inside the room, I saw a hospital bed with monitors and a lockable medicine cabinet. I met with Mom while Dad was out, and she said it was important to her that I finish high school and graduate. My graduation would probably be the last time she left the house because our family doctor had agreed to come visit her from now on. Mom encouraged me to continue my prom arrangement with Mike.

I had not talked to Mike since last Wednesday, and when I called him up, he was waiting for me to call. He didn't want to intrude on us because Susie had told Mike about Mom's situation. Mom insisted he join us for supper, and as usual, Dad bought enough food for a feast. Watching Mike finish the copious amount of food Dad had bought brought a smile to Mom's face. I asked about prom night and Dad exclaimed that Mom had been planning my prom night for over eighteen years. When I pointed out I was only seventeen, Dad smiled at me and nodded knowingly.

The remainder of week was uneventful as prom night approached. Dad was correct in saying Mom had been planning for that long, for she had everything planned to every detail. Mike showed up to pick me up in his dad's new car and Dad scolded him for showing up in a "piece-of-crap car like that." Dad's harsh words about Mike's choice of vehicle left him standing there with his mouth open, not knowing what to say. Then I saw the stretch limo driving up our street while Mom and Dad started laughing at the irony. Mike, not sure if he was in trouble, didn't know what to do at first but eventually started laughing with us. Many classmates were vacationing at Cedar Point for the weekend, but I wasn't going and Mike stayed with me.

Mom announced on Monday that she wanted to go see the office and say goodbye to everyone. Dad would allow it only if she followed his rules, which meant she would have to stay in Rob's office and wait for everyone to come to her, and that she would depart the office when Dad thought it was appropriate. Mom protested Dad's newfound authority, saying she might be sick but she still gave the orders around the house. Dad didn't take her joke very well; his normally warm eyes turned icy blue, and she agreed to his conditions.

Monday was Mom's farewell visit to the office, and Wednesday night she attended my graduation. As Mom predicted, it was the last time she left the house as the cancer dominated her body. I noticed she was popping aspirin on a regular basis, and Dad suggested she start taking her medicine. Mom didn't like the way the medicine made her feel, while Dad encouraged her to get used to the feeling. "It isn't as if you're going to get hooked on it," Dad said and split the pills in half for her to get used to them.

Ol' Uncle Joe would show up a couple times a week and try to get Dad out of the house, explaining I would remain with Mom while he was gone, and Mom told him she wanted the alone time with me. After Dad left for a nourishing lunch with Ol' Uncle Joe, I sat with Mom as promised, thinking she would go to sleep. But she had a lot on her mind and we talked for hours. Mom never slept while Dad was out of the house, so she stayed awake to scare off death until he returned.

Our first personal time together, she told me about marrying Dad way back when. She revealed that Dad was a big show-off when he was young. On the way to the company Christmas party in 1966, they were discussing marriage in general. After they arrived at the party, Dad and Mr. Denkins started drinking while Mrs. Denkins and Mom sat and watched them make idiots of themselves.

Mom explained, "When he got good and liquored up, he got up on the stage, grabbed the microphone, and asked me to marry him. We'd only been dating six months and the drunken fool was asking me to marry him. The next morning, he must have been scared by what had transpired the night before, because he called me at seven a.m. 'Did I ask you to marry me last night?' he pondered aloud, and 'Yes' was my elusive answer. 'You did say yes to my proposal last night?' he posed unknowingly. Since I'd never said yes the previous night, I coyly replied, 'Why should I say yes to your inebriated proposition?' Your father said, 'I'm not drunk now,' and he asked me to marry him again. And this time I did say yes. We talked about an hour regarding our future together and the wedding plans to come.

"After the phone call, I went downstairs for breakfast and your grandmother was reviewing a wedding dress catalog. She'd already rented the hall at the country club and had a caterer for the food. When I asked her about the catalog, she said she'd ordered it a month before because she couldn't wait for two young people to make up their minds. I asked how she knew to order the catalog, and she replied, 'Jack looks at you the way your father looks at me.' By the time the morning was over, we had the wedding plans set except a few minor details."

I had never heard the complete and extraordinary story of Mom and Dad's engagement. Listening intently to Mom's stories, I always wondered if it was the drugs or just the need to

speak with me before she died. She informed me during one of our many personal conversations to be patient with my husband. Men, she expounded, can be dense in their thinking and do not notice signals as they should.

“Even Dad?” I asked, having always thought Dad to be a competent man who saw everything.

She told me, “Your dad was especially difficult to train. He thought he knew everything at twenty-four years old when we married. Set in his ways. I had to train him in everything from picking up his dirty clothes to satisfying me sexually. I let him get away with it one time, but the second time I took control and showed him how to satisfy me.”

This whole talk on their sex life was more than a little creepy. Mom continued, “After that, each time I would lead him to the right spots by directing his hands or slowing him down as needed. Now he’s an accomplished lover after years of demanding by me. I tell you, another key to a happy marriage is never let him leave home without kissing you goodbye. A couple days after our honeymoon, he was going into the office early and didn’t want to wake me. I think he made more ruckus trying to tiptoe around the apartment than just getting dressed. Anyhow, I was awake when he departed for the office and didn’t call him at work that day. When he got home from his extra-long day of selling, there was no supper ready for him. When he asked what the issue was, I looked him in the eyes and calmly said, ‘If you ever leave this house without kissing me goodbye, you can just stay at work.’ I knew from the first ‘I love you’ that the only mistress I had to worry about was work. It’s important a wife not nag her husband, and it’s easier to nudge him in the right direction. Remember, sometimes nagging is the only way to get a man to move.”

As time went by, the painkilling medications made her less coherent. She started repeating herself and forgetting where she was in a story. Her stories were very emotional and in her sick and intoxicated state, she cried a lot. Dad was getting incredibly thin, and a couple times a week, Ol’ Uncle Joe would show up to take Dad out of the house. They both enjoyed Jack Daniels over lunch, and Dad would sleep on the couch after returning. I pointed out how thin Dad was getting to Mrs. Ledbetter, who arranged for someone to meet Dad every day for lunch. Every day, one of his friends took Dad to lunch and ensured he ate a nourishing meal. I would confirm what he ate each time from the friend, and this meant Dad was taking care of Mom while I was taking care of Dad.

The morning of September 4, 1991, Mom declared the pain was gone. Dad had been administering medicine by pushing a button on a machine. He gave her the last dose at 8:00 a.m., and at lunchtime, Gail came to take Dad out to eat. Mom pleaded with Dad not to go to lunch, and Dad stayed by her side the whole day. As the day progressed, Mom became very coherent in her thoughts, and her speech was strong. It was the most lucid I had seen her in over month, but her not getting her medicine troubled me. When Dad went to the bathroom, I asked if she wanted me to push the button to relieve the pain. She said she was without discomfort for the first time in several months and her life was in God’s hands. She was smiling and almost seemed delirious as the end quickly approached. Dad sat valiantly next to her bed while speaking softly to her all day and I watched them for a while. It was if they were a youthful twenty-five years old again

and their intimate love was brand-new. While Dad gently touched her with his rough hands, stroking slowly back and forth, Mom was gleaming with life.

Ol' Uncle Joe showed up to look in on Mom, and this was the first time Dad didn't leave Ol' Uncle Joe alone with her. When the visit was over, her revival amazed Uncle Joe. I told him she hadn't had any medicine since early morning and didn't seem to need it. Uncle Joe called our doctor to inform him of Mom's current condition and that the end was near. The doctor met with Uncle Joe behind the closed den door, and they whispered so I wouldn't hear what they were saying.

In the confusion of the challenging day, I went in to see if Dad required anything. He was leaning very close to Mom, listening intently to her voice, then kissed her and said, "I love you." There was a broad smile on her glowing face as he pulled back from a soft affectionate kiss on her forehead, and then Mom's face went blank. Dad, seeing my disbelieving face in the doorway, called me over to him and held me tightly. I looked at the monitoring equipment. The lines were flat, and all the numbers were registering zeros. I felt sad and happy at the same time, and the moment was very confusing for me. The guilt of feeling gladness and relief after seeing my mother perish before my eyes pierced my heart and thoughts.

Dad turned to me with a straight smile on his distraught face and said, "Now she is in better hands than mine." Dad always knew what say in demanding times to ease the tension of the moment. It wasn't so much what he said but how he said it that made the difference.

Ol' Uncle Joe handled all the funeral arrangements for Mom's burial. He either took us out or had us over at his house for Aunt Maria's good Italian cooking. There was a private wake for family at his house, and Grandpa attended. The next night there was a public viewing for friends and community to attend. The church assembled about three hundred people, and there wasn't an empty chair in the church. Ol' Uncle Joe described the first time he'd changed Mom's diaper and told me no one had smellier baby poop than she did. I couldn't help but to laugh at the varied and numerous anecdotes told about Mom. I tried to think of something amusing to tell everyone, but all I could think of was the talks we had while she was dying. Those very personal stories were treasures in my heart to keep for a lifetime.

The day after we buried Mom, Dad was up early as usual and reading the Bible. I asked if he was all right and he said yes, then asked how I'd slept, as if him reading the Bible was an everyday occurrence. For the next few months, Dad read and studied the Bible, and he even purchased study guides and commentary on it. He always was good at relating to the Bible, but his knowledge grew with every day. As Dad took over the cooking duties from Mom, he became a proficient cook, but there were nights we dined at a restaurant.

At Thanksgiving, we had about a dozen invitations for dinner. Dad proposed we prepare a meal and take it to Grandpa since we were the only family he had left. Dad and I disagreed about who should cook the Thanksgiving feast, and we agreed to collaborate. I made the stuffing since I'd watched Mom make it in the past and Dad had only watched football on those Thursdays. Dad prepared everything else, including the all-important turkey. We had a wonderful time

celebrating the holiday with Grandpa. After a delightful visit with Grandpa, Dad suggested I go see Mike.

“Thanksgiving is for family,” I said, and Dad gave me one of his famous looks of disbelief. This was the first time in my eighteen years he told me, “I love you,” and this new sediment of love was hard to take. He insisted I go out with friends that night, but him saying “I love you” weighed heavily on me all night. For my entire life, he’d always said “LuvYa.”

I had been driving Mom’s SUV since summer when she was no longer able to operate it. At Christmastime, Dad took me to the dealership, where he traded it in on a new car for me. He explained with a sincere heart, “Now that Mom is gone, you need good transportation to and from school.” A smaller, sportier car with good gas mileage should have been wonderful, yet in some way it disappointed me. He seemed to be pushing me away, and I remembered Grandpa never buying Mom a new car.

I went to Ohio University starting the winter semester. I called him every night for the first week to verify his well-being since he was home alone. Every phone call ended with that vexing “I love you” instead of the preferred LuvYa.” The next summer, Dad asked me my opinion of him getting his degree. Not at Ohio U, I joked, and he chose the local college within driving time of the house. It was a great strategy for him because I’d always known he was intelligent enough for college. We discussed him going to college for about a week before he decided to go through with it. Gail Ledbetter aided him in overcoming the obstacles to entering college. My first thought was that it was nice of her to do this, and then I thought he was just pushing me out of the way again.

We purchased school supplies together, where I joked with him about him buying me school supplies years ago. The legend of taking me clothes shopping brought back painful but delightful memories. We had an enjoyable time that night bonding while shopping for what he required. Being on semesters, I departed for school three weeks before he started his first quarter. I offered to return home, escort him to school, and help him adjust to a new lifestyle. He told me to study hard and said he would be able to find his way at school. After all, he had run a -million dollar company. I’d heard of colleges requiring every freshman stay on campus for their first year, but surely they would make an exception for my forty-eight-year-old Dad. Dad arranged accommodations in a deluxe room on campus in a coed dorm. I warned him the loose coed girls would be chasing him, and he chuckled as he rolled his eyes at me.

It was the last weekend in October before I could get home with my sophomore classes. That Saturday afternoon, Dad and a nineteen-year-old girl from college were in the kitchen, their books on the table while they studied. I made a comment about him bringing college girls over to the house unsupervised. He seemed embarrassed by my comment and found out a little later they had no classes together but were roommates.

After she went home, Dad and I went out for dinner since neither of us felt like cooking supper. He asked me about Mike, and I explained that Mike and I had broken up directly after I’d started at Ohio U. He queried into my life as I got the impression he wanted to focus on my private life

because he didn't want to talk about his. Since I had plans to meet with Susie at eight, I left him to pick up the tab without revealing too much.

The next morning, I tried to talk Dad into going to church with me, and he said it was uncomfortable for him to go to church at this time. While eating lunch after church, I wanted to bring the subject of going to church up with him, but his demeanor before church scared me off the subject. I left for school, regretting never bringing the subject of church to his attention.

The next few years slid by quickly, with me trying to catch up with my graduating class and verifying Dad's well-being. At the beginning of my senior year, I met a boy named Brian Williams who would become my husband. Mom was correct during our final summer talks when she said that when you meet the right person, you know it right away. I brought him home for Christmas break, and he spent a couple days with us before going to see his family. Dad made him stay in the fourth bedroom, which you had to pass over the squeaky boards to get out of. After Brian left to see his family, I asked Dad for his opinion of him. Dad's measured comments were neither hot nor cold about Brian, but his demeanor was a little cold. I pushed on the issue of Brian's character and Dad's best observation was, "He is a good boy." It was his way of pushing me away again; I was looking for his approval and received only wishy-washy responses from him.

When Brian and I got back together in January, he told me his mother was giving him the third degree about me. His father insisted he tell all about his girlfriend and his mother would go easier on him. When I told Brian I wasn't sure if Dad liked him or not, he asked me about Dad's response. Brian joked that Dad hadn't pointed a gun at him, and we laughed it off. A little later, I asked him what he thought about getting married, since his mother was pressing the issue. Brian avoided answering the question better than a politician running for mayor.

On February 1, 1996, Brian and I went out to dinner to a restaurant that neither of us could afford. All through dinner, he demonstrated his nervousness by fidgeting and barely eating his meal. I suspected something when he ordered the dessert by telling the waiter to bring dessert. It was only couple of minutes later when the waiter returned with a platter with a silver domed lid on it. He carefully placed the large platter in front of me and removed the shiny dome with flair. There in the middle of the platter was a jewelry box with a small diamond mounted on an unadorned ring. The sight of the gorgeous ring captivated my attention, and then Brian was on one knee asking me to marry him. Looking back, it was not very original but it was romantic and very unforgettable.

Calling Dad immediately after returning to my dorm room, I told him Brian had kissed me and we had to get married. "Who is this Brian and why did you let him kiss you?" Dad posed in an equally sarcastic voice. Upon my sigh, he congratulated me, but I couldn't tell if this news excited him or not. Brian's mother was screaming through the phone and I was across the room when she received the news. Brian is an only boy of four children and admits he is a momma's boy to the core. His father was next on the phone and congratulated him without the excitement of his mother. These special moments of great importance, like the engagement to my future

husband, I really miss Mom. Men don't show any excitement for weddings like women do. They become anxious about giving their children to marriage, but not the wedding itself.

I needed two more classes to graduate and decided to take them in the summer so we could be married in September. During spring break, Dad agreed to pay for the whole event if we got married in my hometown. This arrangement was agreeable to both sides of the future family. Dad gathered me early the next morning and drove us to an unknown destination. Despite constant questioning from me, Dad kept it a secret until we got there. It was the premier bridal shop in the Cleveland area. He sat there offering appropriate comments while I tried on every dress. I could tell by his glassy eyes he was tired, but he stayed on to the end, remaining helpful. I tried on a dress I liked a lot and was looking for a sign whether to buy it or not, and Dad said, "I wish your mother were alive, because this is too hard on a man." Most wedding dress designs emphasize the breasts, and I picked a dress that wasn't so revealing. Dad, using his credit card, purchased the dress with all the fittings to make it perfect.

Gail Ledbetter offered her help with my wedding plans, but I initially turned her down. It was in July that I reached the breaking point with Dad because he was out of his realm and I called Gail for help. She was a godsend with her advice and opinions on the upcoming nuptials. In my frustration, I told her about Dad offering solutions to problems already solved. Upon my asking his opinion, he would reply, "That's your decision" or "Anything you want." Gail told me men are dense when it came to the details of subjects where they lack motivation, like weddings. To men, weddings are something you do to get married; for women it's so much more of an event. "Don't blame your dad for his ill-timed advice; my John was the same way when our daughter got married."

After the rehearsal dinner for my wedding, everyone broke up into small groups. Brian's mom had cornered me and was talking my ear off regarding her baby boy. I looked over and saw Brian and Dad talking intently on the other side of the room. Suddenly, Brian broke out in laughter, and the longer they talked, the more Brian was laughing. For two guys I thought didn't like each other, they were sure getting along.

The Saturday of my wedding came and Dad, who was normally composed, seemed terrified and ecstatic at the same time. He tried to help with my wedding as best he could, but Gail helped me into my dress with all the trimmings. After eight fittings, my dress fit like a glove and it was painstakingly difficult to fit into it. Dad saw me in my wedding dress for the first time and with wonderment in his eyes mentioned how beautiful I looked.

"It better, for what it took to get me into this dress," I erupted with emotion of the day.

Dad said, "You won't have that problem getting out of it," breaking the stress of the day, and I started laughing. He added, "You look like your mother in that dress, and I wish she were here to tell you things a mother should tell their daughters on their wedding day. I don't have the right equipment, but I will try to answer any of your questions."

Feeling less nervous than a moment ago, I asked in a lightened mood what he would say if I was a boy getting married.

Dad smiled with love bursting from his eyes and said, “Kiss your butt goodbye because it belongs to her.” Then he damaged the moment by saying “I love you” instead of the preferred “LuvYa.”

Brian and I went on a weeklong honeymoon because that was all his new employer would give him. It took about a week to settle into our apartment, and I took a position with a nearby company. I invited Dad over for dinner on the following Sunday, and Dad and Brian were watching football and talking. There seemed to be a lot of talking, and when I was growing up talking during a game would get you thrown out of the room, possibly even the house. I moved closer to hear what they were saying, and Dad was telling Brian the sooner he got used to me being in charge, the better he would be. Dad was a leader in industry, yet at home, he was just another stringed puppet for Mom to boss around. There was a pause in the discussion, and then Dad asked if I was listening in to the conversation.

“I’m spying on you two, so you stay out of trouble” was my humorous retort back to Dad.

I invited Dad for every Sunday dinner, and he said, “A young couple needs to have their space.” He enjoyed dinner with us about once a month, which was delightful in sharing our lives.

Brian started golfing to aid in his working relationships, as he told me. Every Saturday morning, he would gather his clubs and head out for golf. It only cost twenty dollars, and he spent another five on beer afterwards. This ritual continued for six weeks or so when he came home and mentioned what Dad had said to him.

“When did you talk with Dad?” I asked, and there was a new revelation over his golfing experience. As it turned out, Brian was playing golf at the country club as Dad’s guest every Saturday morning. I told Brian it really didn’t bother me that they were friends and he should have told me sooner rather than later.

When Dad came for dinner the next day, I asked how was golfing with Brian, and without missing a beat, he said, “Great.”

While I was cooking, the two troublemakers were in the living room talking very quietly. When I peeked around the corner at them, they both went mute at the sight of my eyes peering at them. Only one specific topic of discussion would end so sharply, and that was me. Right after I returned to the kitchen, they started laughing. This time I marched into the living room and confronted them as they quickly stopped their laughter. Brian said Dad was informing him that when a girl grows up, she turns into her mother. For Brian, who’d never met Mom, to say this didn’t bother me, but Dad saying it was something entirely different.

Dad spouted, “See? Just like her mother, when she’s trying to think of something to say, she crinkles up her nose.”

Brian pointed at the exasperation on my face and snickered. This sent a white-hot flash throughout my whole body and all I could do was stare coldly at Brian.

“Boy, I’m glad I’m not in your shoes right now,” Dad said, and he went silent as well when I turned my attention to him. The two mischievous men didn’t have much to say the rest of the

evening and behaved appropriately. After Dad left for home, I found out he had told Brian about “the look” and he could get me to do it. Brian corroborated this: “Your dad was truthful when he said ‘the look’ is a scary sight.”

It took us a little over two years of being married to save up enough money to buy a house. We were looking at many houses when we stopped by a little ranch on three acres at a reasonable price. It was an adorable three-bedroom home with one room painted to look like a nursery. I slyly expressed to Brian that this would come in handy, and Brian said he wasn’t ready for that. I looked at Brian and said he had less than nine months to get ready, and Brian started to tell me he wanted Dad to look at this house. Then it dawned on him what I had said and he was so ecstatic, he told the realtor we would take the house before turning to me to see if I liked it.

Brian’s job would take him out of town every now and then, and Dad agreed to be my substitute coach if needed. The three of us went to Lamaze class together and Dad almost passed out at the film they showed us on childbirth. Dad said with my mother, he was at the bar drinking cheap beer with dinner when they called him when I was born. He continued, “I don’t think this is natural.”

“They call it natural childbirth?” I replied.

Brian was in town the day I went into labor, and Dad waited down at the bar for Brian to call. Brian’s parents drove from Cincinnati while I was in labor. As it turned out, both new grandpas were at the bar drinking a beer when their granddaughter was born. The new grandpas took Brian out for a congratulatory meal and then home to clean up. Brian took a week’s vacation to help me with Caroline, and we learned to be parents. Brian’s parents visited the next weekend after Brian returned to work, and Dad brought BBQ dinner on Saturday night. The three men were in the basement most of Saturday night, talking quietly. Since my pregnancy had begun, Brian’s mother and I had been getting along better. She offered me advice as to what to expect from Caroline and Brian. Apparently, Caroline was going to be a bigger help than Brian would be. It was nice to have another woman to sympathize with motherhood. She expounded that nuts didn’t fall far from the tree and Brian was a big nut that had fallen from a bigger nut tree.

At the end of the evening, the men came up from the basement and they all had solemn looks on their face. While Dad went home and Brian’s parents went to bed, it was almost feeding time and Brian changed Caroline’s diaper. We were talking while the baby nursed, and I mentioned to Brian that his mother thought he turned out just like his dad. Brian appeared to take this news in stride and in fact, it appeared to make him a little happy. Additionally, it would not be long before he would be cleaning his ears with his car keys just like his dad, I added. He gave me a what’s wrong with that? look as he told me the two dads were giving him advice for helping around the house. He would try to complete some housework every day since we were both working.

The next night Brian volunteered to make supper after his parents left. Brian burned the meat, the vegetables were salty, and the mashed potatoes were soupy. We went out to eat that night, and it was the first time for Caroline with all her baby necessities. Coming home early on Wednesday, he offered to cook dinner and I insisted on cooking. He held Caroline while I cooked. The baby

went to sleep and he watched the television. I suddenly remembered Mom saying Dad couldn't boil water, and yet after she died, Dad cooked some fantastic meals for us.

The next Sunday when Dad showed up for dinner, I proposed a husband who willfully burned dinner to get out of having to help around the house. This hypothetical husband had a very rough life after that. There were two older men, remaining nameless, who told a young father to do this, and they were in trouble.

"Hypothetically," Dad responded, "if a young man was doing that, I would have to tell him it was wrong." Brian was a lot more help after that hypothetical discussion. I did let him slide on changing a soiled diaper when he almost vomited.

Caroline was about six months old when the stolen wallet incident took place. Dad was due to have dinner with us on a Thursday since we were visiting Brian's parents over the weekend. Dad appeared for dinner at six, unusually late for the five-thirty dinner appointment. While completing his business in downtown Medina, Dad had found a wallet on the curb of a street. He reported the lost wallet to the chief of police on his cell phone because they co-chaired MDA for the county. The chief said he would have an officer meet him on the street corner and retrieve the wallet for safekeeping. Before the officer could show up, a plain-clothed detective arrested him for stealing the wallet. It turns out somebody had been snatching wallets, taking the money and stealing the credit card numbers.

The overzealous detective handcuffed Dad and escorted him to the police station. A young assistant city attorney found out that the police had arrested my dad and took charge of the case. The young attorney instructed Dad there were going to be no mistakes and he was going to charge him for stealing. Dad explained they spent a couple hours making accusations and didn't ask him any questions. The police chief finished a meeting with the mayor and stopped by the office before heading home at five. When he saw Dad sitting in an interrogation room, Dad explained to him what had happened and how he had been treated. The detective and assistant prosecutor said they were ready to file charges because they checked the call log and there was no call regarding a lost wallet.

Dad sternly informed the two that he had only one witness to his innocence. When they asked who, Dad pointed at the police chief tucked behind the door, unseen by the two in their eagerness. Since they'd never searched him, Dad told them he was reaching into his pocket and pulled out his cell phone. The last completed call in the index was to the police chief's private number to report a lost wallet. The police chief, reaching for his phone, showed the two Dad had called and talked to him regarding the lost wallet. Dad continued telling the two that car 31 had arrived when they were handcuffing him and asked about a lost wallet.

The detective said he didn't see any cell phone used and had video to prove it. Dad revealed the earpiece that had fallen into his jacket when they tackled him. "The rest stays in my pocket and I speak on the phone by pushing a button." Dad asked if there was anything missing from the wallet, and the two "numbskulls" both looked at each other.

The police chief, the detective and the assistant CA departed the room for a while. When they came back, the detective communicated with a remorseful face that Dad was free to go. Dad said someone owed him an apology, and the city attorney advised against it. Dad pointed out several violations of laws regarding police conduct. Turning to the chief, Dad said, “You know me,” and the chief took the detective to the chief’s office. After a heated discussion, the detective returned with an even more remorseful face, giving an apology to Dad. After that day, anytime Dad compared me to Mom, my readymade comeback was the police never arrested Mom for stealing wallets.

I was pleasantly surprised in June of 1999, when Dad attended church one Sunday morning. He came on the arm and at the invitation of Mary Osterhauf, a nurse who had divorced ten years before and became a member of our church. For the next few months, Dad was his usual somber self at church, sitting quietly and not disturbing anyone. Brian and I visited his parents the first weekend in September, and when we returned, Dad seemed to have changed. He was just as confident and fun and had that powerful manner about him, but somehow different. The biggest change was that he was thanking God for everything. Hearing someone sneeze, he said “God bless you” with more conviction in his voice.

At Christmastime, this new and improved Dad didn’t change back, and I asked him about the change in his life. He answered that for the first time in his life, he knew God and realized Jesus died on the cross for him—not for everyone, but him. I asked him to explain, and Dad conveyed, “When I knew that Jesus died on the cross for everyone, it seemed like a nice thing to do. It was an impersonal and distant thought. And now that I know Jesus died for me, it makes all the difference in the world. Jesus didn’t die for everyone; he died for each one of us individually and personally. Then realizing he didn’t die for me, he died because of me set my heart to pondering. Because I’m a sinful creature and the only way for my salvation was Jesus dying on the cross. I struggled for over fifty years trying to understand this simple message that Jesus died for sinners like me. I read the Bible and other books about the Bible trying to understand this message. Then one day I considered my own heart and realized the answer wasn’t in some book but in my own heart. Buried in my broken heart was God anticipating my arrival and asking, ‘Where have you been?’ A big lump of pride and self-righteousness came up, spilling a vile taste into my mouth as God choose me to be a follower.”

The next Sunday while praying in church, I was gazing at the merciful God in a brand-new light. I thought it was Dad’s light at first, but it turned out to be a brighter light than his, and I knew what Dad meant when he said he could hear Jesus talking to him. I heard the same voice telling me everything was under control. Realizing that, by doing everything on my own, nothing turned out good, I started asking for God’s help every day and soon was asking for help in everything. Starting that year, the meaning of Christmas became a more personal gift than it had been in the past.

One Saturday morning in February of 2000, Brian and I were up late and were hoping for a little extra sleep. Caroline, singing in her room, drifted over our bedroom, and I nudged Brian to get up. Brian covered his aching head with a pillow and moaned an inaudible sound. A mom is never off duty, and I got up to see my baby in her cuteness by the morning’s light. Upon opening her

door, my joy turned to horror to see my little girl with her diaper off and playing with the fresh deposit of poop. I hollered at Brian in a panic-ridden voice, and he came running as if the house was on fire. We used baby wipes to clean her up and I immediately cleaned her bed coverings.

I called Dad in hopes of getting sympathy for our extraordinary morning. Instead, it gave him a good laugh to hear the incomparable mess made by his granddaughter. He told me it was entirely Mom's fault my daughter had decorated her room with poo. This left me puzzled, and he explained that when I was about Caroline's age, they had woken to a similar incident. The unsavory matter was in my hair, smeared down my back and infesting my mouth. I'd deposited the feces all over the crib rails, the white sheets of the bedding and the pastel wall next to the bed. Dad had carried me crying into the bathtub for a thorough cleaning while Mom scrubbed the nursery.

After everything was clean and they were eating breakfast, Mom said, "I hope you have a little girl who poops all over herself, the bed, and the walls." Therefore, I can blame Mom for my daughter's antics of the early morning.

The next couple of years flowed quickly, and at Christmas of 2001, I was with child again. Dad hoped for Brian's sake that the trend of all-girl homes had stopped and at least one house had some testosterone. On Groundhog Day, the sonogram showed the stem on the apple, as my Dad put it, and life could not have been better.

On April 10, 2002, at two in the afternoon, I found out it could get a lot worse. It was a very lovely day for April in Ohio, seventy-five degrees and the sun was shining. I was hoping to hear from Dad since I had been just thinking about him and it had been a couple of days since we'd last talked. I was reviewing possible baby names for his grandson when the phone rang. However, it was the hospital calling because Dad was unconscious in their emergency room. They needed me to sign permission forms for treatment since I was listed as his next of kin. Susie agreed to watch Caroline and Brian met me at the hospital. After the required paperwork, I wasn't able to visit Dad, just view at him through the window to intensive care. There were machines hooked up to him and tubes coming and going from every part of his body.

Finally, the doctor appeared and explained that Dad had had a massive heart attack. The doctor rambled on about the massive damage inflicted to the valves and electrical current to the heart. As the doctor rambled in medical terms of Dad's condition, I blurted out, "Is he going to live?"

The doctor explained it was the machines keeping him alive and that he needed a heart transplant immediately to have a chance to live.

I called Mary Osterhauf, the nurse who had been dating Dad for the last couple of years, and instructed the doctor to tell Mary what had happened so Mary could help me out. They talked for what seemed an eternity, and Mary conveyed in plain terms what the doctor had said. With a sad heart, she explained, it did not look good for Dad and she didn't think he would make it through the night.

The next morning Dad went into cardiac arrest, and after working on him for an hour, the doctors pronounced him dead.

The next few days were dreadful, but Brian showed me why he was a desirable choice to marry. He handled all the arrangements, including care for Caroline, while he consoled me. His parents drove from Cincinnati and were incredibly helpful the whole week. There was a private remembrance at Ol' Uncle Joe's house and a public gathering at a center in town. There were speeches by mayors, township trustees, and business associates who'd known him at the public viewing. Rob Owens spoke in a broken voice about Dad's influence in his life and business. A large church in town held the public viewing, and for most of the night, there was standing room only.

At the private viewing, Terrell Denkins got up and told the story of how they met. Terrell had a drunk for a father, and his mother worked all the time to put food on the table. Causing legal trouble for his mother, he quit school at age fifteen and moved to Medina. He bummed around for many years until one day he went to a party at a park in our township. He woke up Monday morning shivering in the park with no money and no way back home. Mr. Sterling found him wandering the country roads and offered him a job while Jack taught him how to run the machines. Terrell explained he was born one day before my dad was, and yet my dad was a better influence on him than his dad. Jack took the time to teach him how to read a book, then worked with him to achieve his GED. He cried aloud. Jack had shown him how to save money, and it was Jack that straightened out his head when he and the missus were having problems.

Brian disclosed Dad's role in us getting married. He said Dad pretended not to like him because he knew if a girl found out that her daddy liked the boy she was dating, she would drop him like a rock. Dad told him Grandpa didn't think they were right for each other and that was what made Mom interested in Dad. At the rehearsal dinner, Dad offered Brian one piece of advice for marriage: "Kiss your ass goodbye because tomorrow it will belong to Katherine." This was my first time hearing Brian tell the story of Dad's role and it made me cry, for I missed him even more.

Speaker after speaker came up and gave testimonials about Dad. I knew Dad was special, but it was enlightening to learn how many people he had touched, and how deeply. It was cold and rainy the spring day when the funeral director laid Dad in the ground. Brian wanted me to stay home because of the baby within me, but there was no stopping me. Brian made me agree to his conditions before allowing me to go. I was to wait in the car until everything and everyone was in place before making an appearance.

The pastor expressed a comforting prayer and they lowered Dad into the ground. I cried my last goodbyes as the sarcophagus closed and said "LuvYa" to him one more time. Mary said she was meeting some of Dad's friends at a restaurant in town that evening after the public memorial. It wasn't too far from the funeral parlor, and Brian agreed to watch Caroline if I wanted to go.

Dad's intimate friends who gathered for a special remembrance were all female, ranging from my age to Mary's age. I recognized one girl as Dad's roommate in college who was less than a year older than I was. She told stories about how Dad had affected the direction of her personal and business life. Another woman worked for ISC was also Dad's girlfriend, and she too had a story about how he'd touched her life. Some of the women got a little graphic in their

relationships with Dad, and it seemed Mom was right when she'd said Dad was an accomplished lover. A young reporter for the county newspaper stopped and asked us questions about Dad. The reporter stayed with Dad's girlfriends, listening to their stories for about two hours after I left. Mary called me a couple months later and asked if I was interested in contributing to a book on Dad. She asked me for some stories about him, and I mentioned that Mrs. Ledbetter would probably want to help.

Dad arranged a college endowment for Caroline and my unnamed child. The attorney, who was executor, recited that the memories Brian and I would build together were worth more than any money he could leave us. Dad had bestowed the bulk of his estate on several charities. The last clause in Dad's last will and testament directly affected Mr. Colachi. The attorney purposely called Ol' Joe "sir" three times in a brief period. As Ol' Uncle Joe was about to say something, the attorney explained it was Dad's wish he do that, and Ol' Uncle Joe just sat there and shivered. I'm not sure, but it looked like there were tears in his eyes as his oldest and dearest friend pulled one last joke on him.

As I got closer to my due date, I asked Brian about names for our expected baby boy. Brian said this was the first mention of this subject since Dad had died, and he had been afraid to bring up the subject. I told him about the phone call from the hospital and my anticipation to talk with Dad about some names. After much deliberation, Brian said he would like to name our son John Brown Williams with the nickname of Jack. I told him that sounded wonderful and Brian acknowledged, "The boy will have some large shoes to fill with this name."

Between losing Dad and Mom, Dad's death was much more devastating. With Mom's passing, everyone knew her time was short, and I had a chance to say goodbye before she left us. On her last day, she was alert to her surroundings, and I told her how we would miss her and gave her my love. There was relief as she passed on to God's hands, for her pain left her body and she was spending eternity in heaven. There was an additional comfort in knowing Dad was still with me for us to care for each other.

When Dad passed away, he spent his last eighteen hours unconscious in the ICU, unable to communicate. I wasn't able to get close to him in the ICU cardiac ward, and he left me without saying goodbye and without me telling him how much he meant to me. Since Mom had died, he had been telling me "I love you," and I had always wanted to ask him what happened to "LuvYa." I had so much to tell him and never found the right time to tell him that he is so much of who I am today. Dad always knew what to say to either infuriate me or make me feel better. Most of all I will miss those chameleon blue eyes that twinkled when happy and were colder than ice when upset. They could be so warm as to melt the coldest of hearts, and at times they were so cold they would scare off the devil himself. I will miss you, Dad.

Chapter 3 by Bonnie (Palmer) Harrison

Jack's First Girlfriend

It was the first week in September of 1992 and I was starting my sophomore year of college. I received the same room as I had the previous year, which meant I didn't have to move anything, since I'd paid in full last spring. The coed dormitory in which I lived was an experiment on campus. The university combined three rooms with four separate sleeping quarters. The soundproofed bedroom walls formed a small central communal area for all to share. The dormitory bathrooms for showering were halfway down the hall, with boys using one and girls the other.

I arrived early Sunday morning. Gloria, a new roommate for me, had moved in on Saturday. Women slept in the individual bedrooms to the left and men in the sleeping quarters on the right. Steve brought his gear up at two, and around two thirty, his father showed up with a television for the common area. Steve was disappointed because there was no cable and we had to preorder the cable and pay the entire quarter in advance. The cable line without the box acted as an antenna and received an Akron PBS channel and a couple of Cleveland channels. We all wondered who occupied the fourth bedroom as the day slipped into evening.

It was after six when this old man showed up carrying a small overnight bag. Waiting for his kid to show with the rest of the stuff, the old man went into the bedroom and came back out a few minutes later. He introduced himself as Jack Brown, but our registration said John Brown, so we asked him about it. His name was John but he grew up as Jack and preferred if everyone called him Jack. When Jack shook everyone's hand, introducing himself, it was like shaking hands with a wrench. After Jack retired early, Steve cried that he'd thought the gorilla was going to break his hand. Jack pointed at the thirteen-inch television on the stand and asked if we were stuck with this. Steve blurted it was his thirteen-inch television and if Jack could do better, Steve said, "Go for it."

I got the impression that Steve thought highly himself as the dominant male. He had a macho personality that the world had to revolve around for him to be happy. Before Jack had arrived, Steve was taking over every conversation. Jack seemed very interested in Gloria's and my opinions. As we discussed our classes and our expectations for the future, Steve disappeared halfway through the night. At 10:00 p.m., Jack announced it was time for bed, and Gloria stayed up with me talking until midnight. We both commented what a great man Jack was, with Gloria adding, "If he were a few years younger, I would marry him."

On Monday, Jack entered the dorm around five, and a local store delivered his new television during the day, including reconnecting the cable into the new TV. When Jack turned on the television, it produced one hundred channels of static and snow. I told him no one had the money for cable and we were using the cable line as a normal antenna. Jack stated he would buy the cable, but we would have to come up with the money for any special channels. Steve informed him it would take two weeks to get the cable hooked up, and he would have to go to their office and pay in advance to get it. Jack pulled the latest pocket-sized cell phone from his jacket pocket, pushed some buttons and said, "Hello," followed by, "Don't you owe me a favor?" Jack

explained the situation and said he would like to have cable by six to watch the stock market show.

About a half hour later, there was a knock on the door and the cable worker said he needed to check the connection. The technician removed the cable from the back of the TV and hooked it to a meter, then called down by radio to someone and said he was getting a good signal. He reconnected the television, turned it on, set the channels and made sure everything was working properly. Jack came out of his room when he heard the television and asked if the cable worker if they were finished. Jack grabbed the TV remote and changed the channel to the one reporting the latest stock market prices. Seeing the work met his approval, he signed the cable worker's paperwork and thanked him. Jack asked if they were working the night shift and the worker explained the boss had requested them to work over that night for this job. Jack took two twenties out of his pocket and told him and his unseen partner to have a beer on him. Jack wouldn't tell their boss about the tip if they didn't, and the worker shook Jack's hand before leaving. Jack sat on the green dormitory coach and watched his show intently, following all the numbers flashing on the screen.

After his show, Gloria came in for the evening and the three of us of became involved in conversation. Steve appeared with disdain on his face to see us on the coach deep in discussion and avoided the conversation, going to his room. It seemed the school didn't make exceptions to their rule about freshmen staying in on-campus dormitories for anyone. Jack had an early-morning class on Tuesdays and Thursday and would be staying in the dorm on the nights before. We were welcome to use the television anytime, but when playing MTV, he said, please keep it down when he was there. The three of us ended up watching Monday Night Football until halftime, when Jack went to bed.

That Wednesday, Jack went to his room and studied directly after his show. I noticed Friday morning, Steve was removing his television from the dorm. When I returned from class, his door was open and the room empty and meticulously clean. We never saw Steve again.

The next Monday, the three of us started a habit of watching football again until halftime. Wednesdays were my study night because Gloria was at a pottery class and went out with friends afterwards. I liked to lounge in my underwear when studying, so I threw on a robe and went to see Jack watching the last of the stock market show. This was the first time we were alone together, and we talked in depth about me and life in general. As the dialogue became reflective, I couldn't help but notice how hot his sparkling blue eyes were.

We were talking for forty-five minutes when Jack stopped me in midsentence and asked me to put that away as he looked down at my breast. Apparently, the last time I'd shifted in my seat it had completely popped out of its hiding spot. Jack showing embarrassment of seeing my breast said he knew a bare breast didn't affect young people, but he was old-school and found them a distraction while talking. I quickly put the fugitive breast under the cover of the robe and was ready to continue our discussion. Jack tried to cover up his embarrassment by making an innocuous suggestive joke. I found his awkward ruse somewhat amusing and decided to

challenge him. To my surprise, he met the challenge, and I found myself amid some heavy petting with him.

Looking back on the situation, I realize Jack was trying to get out of the exploit his libido had gotten him into by saying someone might interrupt us. I explained that Steve had quit school and Gloria was out until ten or later. He added, "We should stop, I don't have protection," and I took Jack by the hand to my bedroom.

Before leaving for school, my mom had bought me a box of condoms because she didn't want any grandkids before I graduated college. I always heard narrow-minded parents say if you buy your kids condoms, they will have sex. In this case, if they hadn't been easily available to us, we probably would have stopped.

Jack was a very gifted lover, and after finishing, he gathered his clothes and left for his room without saying a word. I didn't hear from him the rest of the night, and the following Monday night, Jack didn't enter the dorm until after 9:00 p.m. I heard someone enter the dorm and came out of my room then I saw his door closing behind him. I'd never pictured Jack as a love-them-and-leave-them type, but he was definitely avoiding me.

The following Wednesday, the week after our exploits, Jack was on the couch when I looked out at six thirty. He turned off the stock market show when I peered out my door, and Jack requested I join him on the couch. I paused for a moment, not knowing if I was willing, then sat next to him as I had the week before. I was calling him all kinds of dreadful things in my mind when I looked into his eyes, and instead of hot, they were deep murky pools of sad blue.

He started by apologizing for his behavior for the past week, explaining it was not in his character to behave in a deceitful way. He acknowledged I was a wonderful lover and he appreciated the sacrifice I'd made for him. This was not an excuse for his behavior, he said, but he would like to explain his actions. Usually, when a man frames his reason within a justification, some lame excuse is coming up next. He said his appalling behavior of the past week revolved around his wife.

Shocked by the unexpected news that he had a wife, I became concerned for her well-being. He explained, "I was married for almost twenty-five years when my wife passed away a year ago. In twenty-five years, I was never with any other women and had not had sex since about six months before her passing away. I let my physical needs outweigh my emotional needs, and after we finished making love, it felt as if I had cheated on her. Counting you and my wife, I have had carnal knowledge of two women in my entire life. I thought it was a good time to start anew, but the reality is I still love my wife and am finding it hard to move on to other relationships." Again, he pointed out it was no excuse to behave badly toward me the past week but I understood his anguish.

When he finished his discourse on his unhealthy conduct for the past week, all I could do was hug him. We spent the next few hours talking about his wife, and I found it interesting he always referred to her in the present tense. He entertained me with the story of how they'd met including that she was the boss's daughter and pretended not to like him. She'd told him that he was

arrogant and bull-headed, and yet she'd shown up at a bar where he and other employees hung out after work. He added that years later, he'd overheard his wife and her girlfriend talking about that night at the bar. The girlfriend pointed out his wife had insisted on stopping when she'd seen Jack's car outside the bar. She'd pretended not to be interested in him and ignored him every time he looked over. When Jack wasn't looking at her, she was looking at him, and a friend convinced him to go over and talk with her.

"She dangled the bait in front of me and got me hook, line and sinker," he said, smiling with his warm blue eyes.

I heard my girlfriends speculating about finding their soul mates to marry for life. If my friends desire was Jack and Sarah's story, then I yearned for that relationship also. Jack's blue eyes glistened as he described his wife, and I wondered if one woman could be that great. To him, she was the noble and true love of his life that comes once a lifetime, and he wished I could meet her. Through his first year, we had sex on two occasions and he always got a little depressed afterwards.

Jack was an earnest student, and every time we compared grades, his were As and mine were anywhere between A and C. The winter quarter included a class that was causing major problems for me. There was no comprehending the material, and it didn't matter how hard I studied. Jack's position was that if I started quitting now, it would lead to a lifetime of quitting. He reviewed the material with me and helped me understand it, getting me through the class. He hadn't taken this class or the prerequisite for the class, yet he was able to make the material understandable for me. He had an innate ability to find the answer to each problem. He explained that when faced with a problem, it was better to ask probing questions than trying to solve it as a whole. He showed techniques me for learning new concepts and it was immensely helpful in school and in life. Now that I have children, Jack's questioning theory really acquires their heart to be honest with me about their lives.

In mid-February, our dorm was having a party in the lounge between the two wings of our building. The students hired a DJ to play music and everyone was sitting around listening and talking the whole night. I remembered thinking it was a pitiful party when the DJ went on break and set the player to some Looney Tunes music. Appearing on stage with the microphone, Jack started rhyming songs to the music and dancing a jig. Jack was using a funny singing voice, and everyone began laughing at the sight of this old man's antics. Another student joined Jack on stage, rhyming his lyrics, and before long, there were several people trying to rhyme to the music. When Jack sat with me on a couch, I mentioned his funny voice was hilarious, but I found out later this was his normal singing voice. As the other students perfected their rhymes, the party became more enjoyable and vigorous. He then grabbed me and we started a conga line as the DJ was playing some old-fashioned music. Everyone was having a wonderful time when Jack went home at eleven, and the party continued. Several people requested Jack to return in a couple weeks for another party.

A former boyfriend of mine from high school called me one day, and I was on the phone when Jack entered the dorm. I told Jack my old boyfriend wanted me back, and Jack presented me with

some accepted wisdom. My old boyfriend had dropped me for new girl when I'd left for college and now that she'd dropped him, he wanted the comfort he had before. It was easier for him to seek me for a known consolation than to go looking for an unknown prospect. He'd dropped me once, and when I didn't meet the expectations of his fleeting memories, he would drop me again. Jack also pointed out it was me who admitted I was more in love with the idea of having a boyfriend than with the boyfriend.

Jack added that I was not the same naive high school girl who'd left for college two years earlier. I was older and wiser, and my taste in men had changed. I proposed a boyfriend more like Jack, and he quickly said it could never be him. Jack, happy with our friendship, wasn't looking for anything more because of his commitment to Sarah. I needed a man closer to my age who came home hungry every night for my company. This relentless hunger of youthful desire is the first step in growing old together. When a couple is first married, they cannot keep their hands off each other.

He remembered, "When Sarah and I moved into our house, she spent the day cleaning, and she cleaned everything. She sported tattered clothes and a red bandana, tying her hair back, with her face smudged from the work when I arrived home from work. Watching her bend over to put something away, I wanted her, right there and then. I grabbed her and started kissing and caressing her. She tried to fight off my advance because of what she looked like, but her love for me prevailed and we ended up in the shower together.

"Another time, it was a busy time at work, and I came home exhausted from a long week of everything going wrong. I sat in my favorite leather chair for a night of vegetation while Sarah brought me a beer. She started massaging my neck as I sipped the refreshing beer and began to unwind for the weekend. Then she started to rub my chest. I groaned that I just wanted to sit there, to which she replied, 'Okay.' Stepping out in front of me, she proceeded to strip. And I don't mean she took her clothes off, I mean she stripped like a pro at the girly show. I didn't have to move as requested because she performed the role of the vamp that evening. Sarah took advantage of my love for her that night, and I think she really liked being in control. When we finished, she said now we were even for me making her do it the day she'd cleaned house all day. We ended up eating cold cut sandwiches because the dinner she'd started in the oven was severely burnt by the time we were hungry enough to eat it. Those are the fond memories two hungry young people in love can create together," he added.

Pondering what it was like when people grew old together, I asked about repetition. Jack acknowledged, "We aren't that old—well, not old enough to where I need to ask her if I like beans or not. There's a comfort level reached after a while, and Sarah hates the fact I was comfortable with her. I mentioned one day about being comfortable with her and she made a sour face saying we were too young to be comfortable. Trying to salvage the situation by pointing out what I meant, it was comforting to know she would always be there for me. I don't think she fully accepted my explanation but she did understand my point."

I interjected by questioning the sexual activity at his age. "Oh, that's comfortable as well," he laughed. "To tell you the truth, it gets better with age. The sex may not be as often, but what you

get is fantastic because each partner knows what buttons to push, and we had slowed enough to enjoy the moment. Moreover, with a child in the house, we had to learn how to schedule the event, so we looked forward to the moment when we could be with each other. We came to the party prepared and ready to satisfy each other.”

Still bewildered by the concept, I asked, “So, a lot of late-night rendezvous?”

“One of our favorite times was on Saturday morning when there was a cartoon Katherine liked and we could depend on her staying glued to the TV. Last Christmas Katherine and I were talking about the old TV shows and she mentioned that show as one of her favorite. I explained that it was one of our favorite shows also. She said Mom and I never watched it, and I just smiled at her. Then she thought aloud, and it took a couple of seconds, but she got what I was implying.

“When Katherine was in high school, there was always a dance, a game, or a club meeting in the evenings. We marked those nights on the calendar in red ink to remind us to pick her up from the event. Sarah and I really looked forward to what we called red marker nights and made the most of them. Spur-of-the-moment sex has its advantages and is nice, but planned out and expected is better.”

I asked about monotony.

“First of all, when you’re in love, the sex between couples is everything but monotonous. In addition, you can always bring different things to the party to keep it new. There are different rooms in the house and different positions. Sarah bought a book one day that showed a hundred various positions. We tried some of them, laughed at others and didn’t think the rest were physically possible. To me, this is what made the relationship comfortable, being able to discuss freely any matter with my wife. I don’t think there was anything I couldn’t tell her about myself, and heck, half the time she knew what was bothering me before I did.”

If I was willing to settle for less, his message, was, then I shouldn’t complain when my expectations weren’t met. He had been reading the Bible when the conversation began, and he held it up, saying this book could help me meet my expectations. Ever since we’d met, he was reading the Bible or a book about the Bible in his spare time. Reading the books gave him peace in his life, yet he seemed to be searching desperately for something in all of them. There was a great void in his life and he was searching for the complex answers he didn’t have. I was expecting a long speech about the Bible and going to church and was gathering all the reasons for not going to church, but he left it at that one simple comment and didn’t say anything more. If I ever wanted to talk about God and the Bible, it would be with him.

We were getting our schedules set for the spring quarter when I asked Jack his advice on classes. I was a graphic design student and required some electives. Jack suggested I take some business classes and if possible that I should make business my minor. He pointed out that many engineers were laid off for younger engineers and no one wanted to hire them at the money they are worth. The engineers who had management experience weren’t facing this dilemma. As you progressed in your profession, he said, you would need to take on a management role in the company that employed you. It was best to prepare today for a management position in the future

than to wait and learn on the job. Moreover, if you started your own company, which many in the art world do, you had better have a good business sense or you might lose your shirt.

I hadn't heard this wisdom from any of my college advisors and planned accordingly.

Nearing the end of the spring quarter, tensions are high at any college, and personalities that have been clashing all year sometimes erupt into violence. This was the case late one Wednesday night when Jack and I had been talking and it was approaching ten. The conflict started as a quiet rumble in the dorm hall with two men arguing loudly. It grew in intensity with every word spoken, and it didn't take long before we could make out the words exchanged. Jack, trying to ignore the brawlers, continued talking until there was a thunderous bang against the wall of our dorm quarters. Jack's soft blue eyes became imposing deterrents as he leaped toward the door.

"Hey!" Jack hollered at the two unruly combatants wrestling on the floor, and they froze in their places. With the serious voice of a commanding officer, he told the two opponents to stop fighting. I peeked out our door to see both young rebels standing with their backs against the far wall in awe of Jack's commanding presence.

"What's going on?" Jack barked coldly at the two of them as they just looked at each other and shrugged their shoulders. I was worried about Jack getting involved with a couple of hotheads, but they both just backed down from this old man. His commanding voice stopped their fighting immediately.

The dorm RA opened his door after the ruckus stopped and trivially asked what happened. I thought it was strange he didn't appear from his room until after everything had quieted down. Campus police arrived a minute or so later to memorialize the episode. Jack convinced the police to ignore the brief scuffle between two hyperactive youths. The dorm monitor wanted to press charges, and Jack turned toward the RA, staring him down. Without saying a word Jack got the monitor, who had been talking brashly, to say it was okay. The RA turned to the boys and said not to do it again in a superfluous manner, then strode back to his room.

An ad agency hired me as a part-time graphic designer over the summer. After the summer, they were willing to work around my studies and made it a permanent position. I rented an off-campus apartment that allowed me more quiet time and easier access to work. Jack didn't renew his dorm after his first year and would commute from his home every day. We continued meeting once a week, usually on a Tuesday for lunch, and kept each other informed as to the problems and delights in our lives.

At one the lunches, I informed Jack about a man from one of my management classes. There was something mysterious about him, and it drove me crazy. Jack asked with his smiling eyes if the young man was worth keeping, and I shook my head no, then said yes. I wanted Kevin to meet him, and Jack pondered, "Is it a good idea to have your new boyfriend meet your old boy?"

I replied, "You really weren't a boyfriend," and Jack rightly mentioned we'd slept together.

"He doesn't need to know that," was my explanation, and Jack looked at me as if he wanted to slap me.

Jack opined, “Starting off a relationship on a lie makes for a rocky relationship. If you build a house on a soft foundation, the first storm will wash it away, and if you build your house on a foundation of rock, then no rain or wind will break it.”

I explained that, after hearing him talk about how Sarah and him not having sex until the wedding day made their honeymoon special, I would like that for myself. Jack urged me to tell Kevin the truth and explain he was worth waiting for and Jack was not, but tell him the truth.

Jack continued, “If a man is in love with you, it doesn’t matter about your past, he will love you. You must present yourself totally to him, and if he rejects you, then it was never meant to be. If he accepts you with complete honesty, there won’t be any surprises for him later. To me, Sarah was the sexiest woman I ever met because I saw her through loving eyes. Even near the end when her back pockets got filled out and her boobs were sagging, there was no other woman who could touch her in my mind.” It was a loving sentiment, but I didn’t think Sarah would approve of his description of her.

It took me another two and half years to graduate with a business minor. The day after graduation, Kevin and I were meeting with his parents. His mother inappropriately asked when I was going to make an honest man of her son and that made me wonder what it was with moms and their sons. His dad implored her to leave us alone and offered an apology for his mother. Later that day, we were heading to see my parents and Kevin brought up what his mother was saying. We had discussed marriage as an institution in the past, but now he seemed to be feeling me out for a response. I insisted that if he wanted to know if I would marry him, he would have to ask me. To my surprise, he instantly wrenched his old car to the side of the road and parked it on the berm. I figured at that point, he was either going to throw me out of the car or ask me to marry him. It was the latter, and in my excitement, I forgot the actual words he had said.

Arriving to my parents’ house, we told them about the exciting developments on the drive over. My stepdad said congratulations, and Mom wanted to start planning everything out that night. Stepdad asked what Kevin’s parents thought of the idea and we explained it had literally just happened on the way over here. Stepdad picked up the handset of the telephone, telling Kevin to call his mom and give her the good news of our engagement.

Kevin called his house and when his dad answered, Kevin told his dad to tell Mom we had become engaged on the way over tonight. Then he hung up the phone. I stared at Kevin, shocked at his total disregard for his mom’s feelings, and he said, “What? If I actually speak to her, she’ll keep talking me on the phone forever.” But Kevin had forgotten she had caller ID, so he had to speak with his mother when the phone rang a minute later. My stepdad left the room so Kevin could talk with his mother, and I don’t think she was pleased to find out about our engagement the way she did.

Sitting next to Kevin while his mother spoke to him, I couldn’t hear what she was saying, but it sounded excited. When Kevin finally got a word in, he said, “Here’s Bonnie,” and he handed me the phone.

My mom got on the other phone in the kitchen and we talked about the upcoming nuptials. When we finished, my stepdad and Kevin were in the kitchen sucking on suds, as Dad would say. My mother offered to put clean sheets on my bed for us and I told Mom Kevin would be sleeping in my brother's old room. Mom said we were out of college and getting married and she wouldn't mind having grandkids now.

Kevin and I both obtained profitable positions in the Akron area. We found a home that was a forty-five-minute drive to either of our parents' house and figured it would be a good place to settle down. Kevin wanted to move further from his mother because she would want to come over often if we lived too close. I didn't understand the problem with his mother because she and I got along well. Our new home was about twenty minutes from Jack's house and was a local telephone call.

Soon after we were married, Kevin got up one Sunday morning and invited me to join him at church, but I declined, not being a believer. While Kevin was attending church, I called Jack, who asked what my objection to attending church was. I explained that Mom would force me to go to church every Sunday, and I had grown to hate it and vowed never again. Jack asked if it was the church proceedings or being forced to attend that I hated. After some intense deliberation, I had to admit it was being forced that had caused the angst. Jack explained church wasn't so bad and it could be quite entertaining while socializing with friends. If you didn't like preaching, there were plenty of activities to help others enjoy the sermons.

I asked Jack why Kevin had suddenly started going to church, since I didn't recall him attending before we'd married. Jack said, "First of all, you should ask Kevin, but when a man marries a woman, the two become one in spirit. This significantly changes the man because without a woman joined to him, man cannot be complete. Without God mediating the couple's spirit, the marriage is subject to more problems than it can handle. The responsibility a man takes on when marrying a woman is much greater than when he was single. It's only natural for a man to find help with the added responsibility. Then again, he may be thinking that is what you do when you get married. Men are creatures of habit."

I asked why Jack didn't attend church on Sundays, and he snapped, "I am not married."

I started going to church with Kevin the following Sunday. Jack was correct again when he claimed church isn't that bad when you attend volunteering.

Kevin discovered he liked having barbeques. We started small, with just the neighbors attending, but after a while, it became a Saturday night ritual with many people attending. Once a month Jack would ask, "What's for barbeque?" and Kevin would invite Jack over for a new adventure over hot coals. We got our first snow in late October that year and figured the barbeques were over for the year. To my surprise, you get better flavor when barbequing in the cold, and we barbequed year-round.

The next spring, Jack suggested a deck for our house to avoid the snow and mud when barbequing. Jack and Kevin became excited at the prospect of outdoor dining and planned our new deck. The next Saturday, Jack appeared at a shocking 7:00 a.m. with a friend named Ol' Joe

and his pickup truck. I had sketched out my best design with important elements, and Ol' Joe abruptly stated, "That's no good."

We had two plans, one that Jack and Kevin had drawn and mine, which I'd modified from Jack and Kevin's sketch. Ol' Joe, using stick figures, drew out a third option, incorporating what I wanted with more functionality. Ol' Joe asserted we needed space for table, chairs, and the grill, plus his design would use less building material, with access to the basement to run a gas line.

By eight, the three headed for the lumberyard. Arriving back around nine with a load of wood in the back of Ol' Joe's pickup truck, they sank the post into the ground and cut all the wood to size that day. Sunday afternoon, they finished the project and Kevin grilled some steaks for everyone while we sat out on the new deck. During the warmer months, the outdoor wood deck was the most utilized room of the house.

Jack called me in the fall of 1999 and said the Lord had opened his eyes and he could see. Jack explained that at the end of service, while he was praying for an answer, God opened his heart and mind to the word. One memorable thing Jack said kept running through my head for the next couple of weeks: "Jesus didn't die for everyone, he died because of me." Years before, Jack had suggested I talk with my husband about matters of the church, which I'd ignored. Now I was afraid and ashamed to ask Kevin, and I couldn't bring it up to Jack again. The last few weeks had been very eventful, with no one thing making it difficult but everything together putting me in a stressful condition.

Hearing that our church offered a day care while you were at service, I made an appointment with Pastor Bob to speak with him, and he arranged day care for Kevin III and baby Jill. I told the preacher about the problems I was having and that, to complicate things, I had been wondering more about God these days. I'd even been trying to pray to God for help, and a couple of weeks ago I'd prayed for patience while I figured all this out.

At this news, the preacher chuckled and immediately apologized for his impolite behavior by explaining God had answered my prayer. He continued, "The Bible tells us that you learn patience by trials and tribulations." We discussed God, the Bible and the church for an hour, and intellectually it all made sense, but something was missing.

Walking down the hallway to retrieve my children from the nursery, I passed the sanctuary. The doors were wide open, and the sanctuary was dark except for one single light shining on the cross. The reflection gave the great hall a luminescence to it. Thinking how beautiful the cross appeared in the light, I walked the wide passage that led to the cross. I was about halfway to the pulpit when Jack's haunting words about Jesus dying because of me burst into my mind. "Because of me?" kept repeating in my mind, and then I asked defensively, "What did I do?" As the last of my defense came out of my mouth, I felt my heart turn cold and every wrong I ever committed had a hold of it.

One by one, each of these transgressions exposed themselves to convict my spirit and mind. The guilt of not talking with my husband when I should have, minimizing my mom's role in my life, yelling needlessly at the kids, and more placed a heavy weight upon my heart. This burdensome

regret had controlled my life for so long I couldn't destroy it without it killing me. I wanted to cry for each exposed sin, but there was a voice in my head telling me it was not yet time to cry. Feeling my knees become weak, I sat on the floor, waiting for the procession of infractions to end. Just when my heart got so full of all this guilt that I thought it would explode, with a tiny click, it was all gone. In my heart, where guilt reigned sovereign, there was a peace never known before, and then it was time to cry.

I lay there sobbing joyfully as the enormous guilt from my whole life dissolved in a brief second. In its place of this sinful indignity, God had placed peace, love and joy for eternity. Suddenly, I understood everything I'd read in the Bible and that Jesus is real, He is alive, and He is God. He died, was buried in a tomb, and rose again so at this very moment He would forgive my sins. Pastor Bob came to me, still sitting on the floor crying childishly, and asked if there was anything wrong. Smiling, I said everything was all right, and we sat on the floor talking for a half hour more about Jesus.

It was April 11, 2002, and I had not heard from Jack in over a week. Remembering a very good barbeque the past Saturday where Kevin had served Cornish game hens from a spit, I called Jack at his house to gloat over the delicious meal. Brian, Jack's son-in-law, answered the phone and wondered who I was. Briefly explaining our friendship, I asked Jack to call me back at a suitable time. Brian lamented, "Jack won't be able to call you back because he passed away yesterday."

My first thought was that Brian was participating in a practical joke on me, with Jack waiting for the punchline. It had to be a joke because Jack was always so full of life, and I waited for Jack to shout, "Surprise!" After a long, awkward silence as I waited for the punchline, all I could say was "wow" and Brian said he knew how I felt.

The next day, Brian called me to say there was a private viewing on the fifteenth and a public viewing on the sixteenth. The private viewing of family and close friends had about fifty people there. I appreciated being at this function because of the variety of people sharing their personal memories of Jack. Everything seemed to revolve around his daughter, who I had met once back in 1992. Several people who had known Jack longer than I gave testimonials about Jack and what he'd meant to them. I noticed what they said about Jack corresponded with my feelings for him.

Jack was a strong and compassionate man who gave of himself entirely. There were no accomplishments left half-done or halfhearted by Jack. I never met a person who spoke ill of him or I would have most certainly defended him. There are people smarter than Jack was, but I have yet to meet someone wiser. He had a way of looking past the image you portrayed to see the real you and of accepting you for who you are. I will miss his smiling blues now that Jack has joined Sarah resting in the heavenly comfort of God.

Chapter 4 by Mary Beth Lassiter

Jack's Second Girlfriend

I was divorced in May of 1992 from a man who was my husband for ten years. I went to downtown Cleveland on a Wednesday morning to surprise him, wearing nothing but a teddy under my coat. I was hoping to have lunch at a nearby hotel and spend a couple hours with my husband. His secretary wasn't at her desk, which made it easier to spring my surprise on him. I loosened my coat to ready the gift, flung open his office door in a sexy manner, and howled in surprise. The surprise was on me because his secretary was on the couch and my husband was on her. An afternoon delight with his wife was far from his mind at this point as the door swung completely open.

I let out a bloodcurdling scream, then had a few choice words for my husband and his secretary. I don't remember ever using those words before, and I hope there's never an occasion to use them again. Securing my coat and running for the elevator with tears dripping down my cheeks, I passed my husband's boss running towards his office. There were several coworkers peeking out of their offices to see the late-morning commotion. When the elevator doors opened, I was tying my coat as I watched my husband run down the hall while dressing. As the elevator doors closed, he was tucking his shirt into his pants and yelling, "Hold the elevator!"

When I arrived at home, the pain of seeing my husband with his pants down on top of his secretary turned to anger. I was furious at him for unfaithful act and wanted to hurt him back with the pain inflicted on me. As the afternoon progressed, the anger subsided as I thought about our family and the importance of keeping it together. We could work this out, I decided, and it might take all night, but I was determined to make our marriage succeed. I sent the kids, Jane and Michael, to my mom's house for the night so they didn't hear of their father's despicable acts. Cooking dinner for just the two of us, I set up TV trays in the den, figuring it would be most favorable for a long talk with my husband.

I pictured my husband being apologetic and humble upon arriving home. Instead, the man was yelling at me for the ruckus my outburst had stirred up in the office. He was upset because of the scene created by my hysterical screaming and that his boss had observed the commotion. Pressing me harder over the fact, he said he had to sweet-talk the boss just to keep his job with the company. For a moment, a very small moment, I was ready to give in to his ranting with an apology of my own. He acted as if it was unimportant or my fault that he had been having sex with his secretary on the couch. The revolting memory of my outburst angered me to the point that I took his dinner and threw it in the dog dish. My agitated aim must have been from across the kitchen, because the next day there was sizeable a mess to clean up. Putting on my coat, I left for my mother's house to spend the night with my children instead of my husband.

In court about six months later, he tried to deny having an affair with his secretary. His boss's wife and I were on the same PTA committee and she informed me of what her husband and their fellow employees had seen that day. They all agreed to testify for me in court, including the boss, how they'd seen them getting dressed and the secretary was still topless when he looked in the office. The judge wasn't happy with my husband's attitude, and I got the house while he got the payment until the kids were grown. Upon the children reaching adulthood, I would have the option to buy out the remainder of the mortgage. The judge ordered him to pay seven hundred and fifty dollars per child and one thousand dollars in alimony per month. He was keep all three

of us on his health care until Michael, the youngest, was eighteen or finished with college, whichever came later.

The morning of July 24, 1993, I found out the alimony had been reduced to five hundred dollars per month since it was a hardship on my ex-husband. I started searching for a part-time job to meet my monthly financial needs. I needed a couple things at the grocery store and picked up a newspaper to see if there was anything out there for me. I was in a hurry to start my search at home, and the grocery store had just installed a barrier that beeped when shoplifters tried to take things out of the store. I bypassed the barriers to save a step and made a sharp turn around a concrete wall for a quick exit. Just as I hurriedly cleared the block wall, I ran into a man leisurely entering the store.

I am barely five feet tall, and the only time I've weighed more than a hundred pounds was when I was pregnant. My head bounced off the man's solid chest, and I found myself sitting on the ground, gazing up at this man's polished blue eyes. The look of surprise on his face made his eyes glimmer, and he immediately apologized for the collision while picking up my few groceries. He helped me off the ground with his rock-hard hands and insisted on buying me a cup of coffee at the in-store restaurant. I declined at first, but then he gazed at me with those brilliant blue eyes and I agreed to a cup of coffee. He wanted to make sure I was all right, then he made the mistake of asking me what was wrong. The next half hour was spent with me telling him my life story. Most men would have gotten a glazed-over look on their faces, but he seemed genuinely interested in my mess.

I told him about having my alimony cut in half and that I was looking for a part-time job to make ends meet.

He said, "Don't you mean position?" and explained that a job is one thing you do while a position has growth and meaning to it. I would prefer a position, but who would hire me for a position with two young children to worry about? He told me of a company about twenty minutes from Medina, which turned out to be about ten minutes from my home. He said the president of the company had told him that very morning how it would be nice to find someone to do data entry on a part-time basis. The person would need to be proficient at the keyboard and be able to read the information going into the computer. That sounded very interesting, and I wanted to know more. He didn't have any more information but said I should contact the personnel manager at Intricate Stamping Company. Asking to use his name as a reference, I realized I didn't know his name. Jack Brown, he said, but he asked me not to use his name since the personnel manager might not like him. Jack gave me his card and wanted me to let him know if I got the position with the company.

Upon arriving home, I looked up the number for Intricate Stamping Company. Karen Colvin answered in personnel, and I mentioned I'd heard they might be looking for someone to do data entering. Karen was shocked by my request because she'd just gotten out of a meeting where they'd discussed that subject. She told me it would be a part-time position for several hours during the day and they would be willing to work around other scheduling problems, such as day care or school. I made an appointment for the next day and met with Karen in personnel to apply.

She had me enter a strange short story into the computer to verify my skills. I noticed a couple of misspelled words and asked her if I should correct them or leave them as they appeared. After the interview, Karen had me wait while she went and checked on something. Upon her return, she told me I had the job and would start on Monday at eight dollars per hour.

Arriving home just after lunch, I called Jack to inform him the position at ISC was mine. He was very pleased for my new opportunity, and I offered to cook a meal for him and his wife. I'd assumed incorrectly that he was married since he was wearing a wedding band. He explained he was a widower, but he would be pleased to have dinner if the offer was still open. The children were staying with their father for the weekend, and I offered to cook for him on Friday night.

I fixed him my best dish, a pot pie from a recipe that had won an award at a PTA cookoff. My ex was late picking up the children as usual, and they departed just before Jack arrived for dinner. I was frantic and getting flustered by everything happening at once. Not properly greeting him at the door, I blurted, "Sorry to hear about your dead wife," which wasn't how I'd wanted to say it.

Jack understood my situation. I have always had a problem with saying something meaningful and having it come out horribly. My heart calmed down as he conversed with me in his comforting voice and charming demeanor. I'd revealed my shattered life over coffee in our first meeting, and now I asked him about his life. While I was finishing dinner, Jack told how he'd had to support his family after his dad had died and how he'd married the boss's daughter, bought the business and retired when she had come down with cancer. I found it fascinating that when he mentioned his wife, Sarah, it was as if she was still alive. After dinner, I thanked Jack for the employment tip and the position at ISC.

We talked for a couple hours about my new job, my kids, his daughter at college and many other things. There was something safe about Jack, and somehow I knew he wouldn't hurt me or take advantage of me. It was getting close to ten at night, and he suggested departing for the evening. When I mentioned I hadn't been with a man since before the divorce, Jack just looked at me with his blue eyes shining in wonderment. I pleaded with him not to leave and offered to spend the night with him. He appeared to be very astonished by my carnal suggestion and mentioned an early-morning appointment, asking to leave. I placed the most sensual kiss possible on his unsuspecting lips. My bold persuasion changed his conflicted mind as we spent the night together. He did get out early the next morning, and by lunchtime, flowers arrived with a thank-you note attached. I called his house and left a message to the effect that I had nothing to do until six Sunday night if he would like some company.

We dined out Saturday night and ended up back at my house for the duration of the night. Sunday morning, we discussed the weekend and I told him it wasn't a good idea for me to bring men over to the house when the kids were home. It was sleazy to leave the children with babysitters and have a night on the town. He asked if this was goodbye, and I said until next month, when their father picked them up for his next weekend.

I reported to work on Monday at nine and met with Karen Colvin. She gave me an introductory package with the rules of the company and asked me to review them. Scheduling my hours, I explained that the kids were in school from early morning until three and I would like to be home

when they got there. My mother would watch them until school started and any day they were out for vacation. Karen said the job required about twenty hours a week to enter all the information. We scheduled hours that were agreeable to me and worked well with the company's plans.

She asked how I'd heard of the opening, since it hadn't been officially open until the morning of the day I'd called. I told her Jack, a man I'd met, had told me to call and that I wasn't to mention his name since he didn't know if she liked him or not. With a bewildered look on her face, she asked for Jack's last name, and I simply stated Brown. She took me into the hall and pointed at a picture of Jack before his sideburns had turned gray.

"That's him," I said confidently, and she immediately called Jack, asking why she wouldn't like him. Jack clarified that he hadn't wanted to influence her decision and therefore had asked me not to use his name. This meant I had gotten the job on my own, but Jack reminded me later it was up to me to keep the position.

The weekend before Jane and Michael were to visit their father, I called Jack to see if he was free for the weekend. He had plans for Friday night, and Saturday he was attending a BBQ picnic. My heart sank at the news because it meant we wouldn't be meeting the second month. He asked if I would escort him to the family picnic on Saturday afternoon. "That sounds great," I said, trying to hide my delight, and Jack agreed to pick me up at one for the BBQ. I decided to wear a dress and high-heeled boots because someone as important as Jack would have a fancy BBQ.

Jack showed up wearing tennis shoes, old blue jeans, and a short-sleeved shirt, and I could tell by his eyes he wanted to say something. I asked if the expensive ensemble was too much for the occasion, and he replied, "At least those fancy boots."

We went to see some friends of Jack's, and it was a family get-together with four generations attending. The owner of the farm surrounding ISC was the host of the party, and he said any friend of Jack's was a friend of his. Later in the day, the host told me how they had become friends.

"It started back in 1942. The war was on and everyone was making sacrifices. There was a push to get more food to market to help our troops, and Mr. Sterling made a deal with my dad to farm the eighteen acres next to the company. In return, my dad would pay Mr. Sterling two dollars an acre and a bushel of sweet corn at harvest time. After the war, my dad wanted to keep farming these fertile acres and offered Mr. Sterling more money to do so. Mr. Sterling told him not to bother with the extra money, just plant additional sweet corn for him and they would call it even. Every year my dad would pay Mr. Sterling thirty-six dollars and all the sweet corn he cared to have.

"I bought the farm from my dad in 1969, and in 1970 I bought the Connelly dairy farm. Jack bought ISC in 1972. Even though money was tight for him, he kept the same arrangement, knowing the tough times farmers were having. In 1973, Sarah was having a baby and ISC was on the rocks, the Mrs. and I sent a side of beef to Jack so they could at least eat. Since that time, when something needed to be rebuilt, Jack would let me use their machine shop."

The gathering was festive and I wished the children were with me. I beat Jack twice at horseshoes.

Every month while the children visited their father, we would meet for a weekend to relieve the tensions that built up. After a year of my meeting with Jack, my ex-husband sued for custody of the children, claiming I was having wild sex parties while the children were in the house. He named Jack as the leader of these activities and said the parties at the house were having a bad influence on the children. In his complaint, my ex cited several events with posted dates and times to support his spurious claims.

The lawyer stated that the hearing was in two days and he had just gotten the list of offenses claimed by my ex-husband. Jack suggested to my lawyer that he not respond to the claims until we reached court for the first hearing. A year ago, Jack had taught me to keep an organizer for dates and times in a pocket datebook. By notating the engagements in the organizer, I could remember my appointments without looking at the organizer. The last six months I had kept every meeting, party, and event for my family in the organizer. The three of us looked at the list of complaints by my ex and compared them to the organizer. One of the parties my ex noted was a Tupperware party from six to eight, which my daughter helped host and was very proud of it. A couple of dates were PTA committee meetings, and the last was Jane's tenth birthday party for her and her girlfriends. The lawyer asked how many times Jack had met the kids; counting today, Jack emphasized, zero. The lawyer asked Jack to be at the hearing, and Jack said he was already planning to be there.

At the hearing, my ex's lawyer said he hadn't gotten our reply and wasn't ready for court, which seemed to upset the judge. My lawyer pointed out it was after four o'clock just two days before when the list of complaints had reached his office. There had been no time to review the complaints, but he was willing to participate in the hearing today. The judge told my ex they'd had over a month to send the information and they would have to deal with not knowing our response.

While on the stand, my ex reiterated his list of complaints as we'd received them two days before. My lawyer took each of his complaints one by one and shot them down using my organizer. For each date my ex claimed I'd had a wild party, he pointed out the truth. My daughter's birthday party, for which the ex failed to show, was the last and most descriptive complaint by my ex. The judge's jaw almost hit the desk when he found out it was my daughter's birthday party and it was eight ten-year-old girls going wild.

"What about the wild sex parties with some old man who thinks he's Hugh Hefner?" my ex blurted out. Jack took the stand and explained we were together only when the children were at the ex's house. My ex's lawyer asked if there were any other men in my life, and Jack said he didn't think so. The lawyer told Jack he couldn't be sure if he was there only once a month.

"No," Jack replied, "but a man can tell when a woman hasn't had sex in a month."

Everyone but my ex laughed at Jack's comment. The judge asked if Jack had ever met my kids, then later confirmed with the kids in a closed-door session with them.

The judge was so angry at my ex that he ordered the child support to go up to one thousand dollars per child per month, and my ex would have to pay all court costs, including my lawyer's fee. "The next time you want to get out of paying child support," the judge yelled at my ex, "you better have your story straight." The judge added that if he lost his job for any reason, he was still responsible for the child support, insurance and house payment. The first missed payment involving his family, the judge threatened him with jail time.

There was something about the way Jack answered the questions in court that no one challenged him. When Jack said something, it was believable and accepted as true. I can be overtrusting at times and thought it was just my reaction to Jack, but it seemed the rest of the world saw Jack the same way.

By far the subject most talked about in our monthly meetings was his wife, Sarah. Jack didn't mention her during our third monthly sleepover, and it was nice because we focused more on me that month. A couple days afterward, I missed hearing about Sarah and marveled at the way he referred to her as if she was still alive. Sarah became a friend of mine through the stories Jack told, and I mentioned Sarah to a friend as if we'd met the week before. If she was half the woman Jack described in his many stories, she was incredible.

One of my favorite stories Jack told me about Sarah concerned the birth of his daughter, Katherine. I had heard him say on several occasions say he was in a bar drinking cheap beer when Katherine was born. I told him it wasn't a pleasant thing to say and he explained, "We were eating breakfast at six in the morning and Sarah was feeling sick. Her upset stomach was bizarre because she didn't feel nauseous during the first few months when most women did. I had just started eating my breakfast when she darted to the bathroom with great urgency. Her erratic behavior was out of the ordinary, and I followed her. She left the bathroom door open, and for Sarah this was unique because she always closed and locked the door so I wouldn't know what she was doing in there. Yet when I followed her into the bathroom, there was no mistaking what she had done.

"She gazed amazingly at me with those big brown eyes and softly said her water had broken. My first instinct was to check the commode for leaks, and a second later the lightning bolt it hit me—the baby was coming. We had a suitcase packed in the closet for this precise moment and when I picked it up, it was empty. The carefully packed suitcase her mother had used many years before, and now it was empty. She scolded me to grab the other bag, and when I turned to say something about being fickle, her face was beet-red and her eyes were bulging! It only lasted a minute, and I asked if she was having a contraction.

"She glared at me and sarcastically said, 'No, I was just trying to get my eyes to pop out of their sockets.' I thought it best to avoid asking any more questions until this ordeal was complete.

"We were almost to the hospital when she had her second contraction, which was about twenty minutes later. She wanted to wait until the contractions were closer, but I insisted we leave right away. After we took her to a birthing room, the doctor on call gathered some information. She told the doctor we should have waited to come in until she was about ten minutes apart. The doctor countered that with the water breaking, it was better we came earlier than later. I started to

gloat about being right when the third contraction started, and my smirking was very bad timing on my part. My sweet angel of marriage turned to a raging monster for about a minute and she described the pain as my fault entirely.

“I spent almost every minute with her throughout the day. At noon, her contractions went from twenty minutes to thirty minutes. At four, she had not had a contraction since three fifteen. About every hour during the day, a nurse would come and build a tent around her legs and call out ‘one.’ After a couple times of the nurses checking her, I suggested if they find two of them down there, they should call Guinness and I was in trouble again. Her OB/GYN, now present, was explaining the birth could take a couple hours or all night, for only God knew for sure. Sarah asked me if I had eaten anything all day, and I said breakfast and the Jell-O from the so-called lunch they’d brought her. She protested that there was more breakfast on the table when we’d departed, and Jell-O didn’t count as food. She insisted I eat something while there was time before the birth of our child. I didn’t like hospital food, and she suggested a quaint diner we’d passed on the way. It looked if they have tasty food, she said, and I went to the diner that looked so good from the outside.

“This nice diner from the outside was a grungy bar on the inside, and it wasn’t much more than a honky-tonk. They had two kinds of beer, cheap and cheaper. And when I say two kinds of beer, I don’t mean just on tap, but two kinds of beer in the whole place, and they were cheap. Their menu consisted of a small chalkboard with burgers for fifty cents, the two other items they offered swiped away. I ordered the cheap beer with the only menu item, a burger, and the can of beer was cool at best. The burger took about a half hour to prepare and I ordered a second lukewarm beer. The burger was well done—very well done, and in fact, it crunched when I bit into it. At first I thought it was crispy lettuce, but then I remembered the bartender’s reply: ‘Burger don’t come with no lettuce.’ I could only eat a couple of bites from my crunch burger and choked down the warm cheap beer with the side of stale chips.

“The failed dining experience couldn’t have taken me more than an hour to complete. As I walked down the hall to Sarah’s room, everyone was congratulating me. I finally asked why, and the nurse at the station explained my baby girl had come about fifteen minutes ago. Delight and happiness filled every pore in my body. It didn’t take but two steps for me to realize I was at a bar when she was born and not by my wife’s side as promised. I never knew fear until that very moment,” he said, and you could see the fear in his eyes as he told this part of the story.

“I walked into the room and smiled, gave Sarah a big hug, and I hoped she didn’t notice I was missing in action. My father-in-law was happy to point out where I was at the time of the birth, and I grumbled, ‘Thanks a lot, Dad.’ When the endorphins activate during childbirth, it works wonders. This woman, who was ready to hurt me before I left, called me a wonderful husband who she forced to go out and eat something.

“Her OB/GYN said it was the strangest thing he had ever seen in twenty years of birthing children. He was on his way out for dinner when a nurse stopped him and said Sarah was at ten centimeters and crowning. Apparently, I wasn’t gone five minutes when the contractions started again, and they were coming less than two minutes apart. Half an hour later, our baby girl was

born, and by the time I returned to the hospital, Sarah was back in her room, recovering. The doctor told me I had my hands full with this daughter of mine because she was already causing trouble. Sarah reiterated I wasn't in trouble, but she would bring up the cheap beer and crunch burger from time to time."

Jack was a good storyteller, especially when talking about Sarah. The faces he made while telling the stories were priceless, and I got a foul taste in my mouth when he mentioned the crunch burger. Another story he liked to tell was about when Katherine was caught drinking at age sixteen, and with my kids approaching that age, it sounds like a good remedy for drinking.

I like country music and took Jack to a nightclub that played country music in the summer of 1994. An old George Jones melody came on the jukebox called "He Stopped Loving Her Today." It's about a man who fell in love with an unfaithful woman, and the sad man loved this woman until he died. Jack's eyes welled up with tears as the melancholy tune played. The next time we met, I noticed there was George Jones tape in his car, and he explained there was something about the song he really liked. The first night at the country bar, I encouraged Jack to sing karaoke with me, never knowing Jack not to try something new. But it took considerable convincing to get Jack to sing with me. He attempted to inform me that he couldn't sing a note, and I believed him after hearing him sing. For someone whose velvet speaking voice melted the coldest hearts, he was not a crooner. It was if his natural singing voice was between two octaves and would jump from one to the other all through the song. If the undulating pitch wasn't bad enough, he had no beat or rhythm and often fell behind the music. The lyrics coming out of his mouth were flat and without inflection, sounding robotic.

We met each other almost every month for two years as friends first and lovers second. I met a divorced father of two at a PTA meeting named Harvey, and we hit it off over coffee one meeting. Harvey asked me out, and his invitation to a deeper relationship sounded pleasing. Jack was a friend, but Harvey piqued my interest, and my relationship with Jack was stagnant as friends. Giving my phone number to Harvey, I asked him to call me the next week, giving me time to think about it. I revealed Harvey's proposal to Jack and the romantic impression I had when he asked me out. Jack said he didn't think I knew the man that well, but I knew enough to want to know more. Jack said I should pursue this relationship but be careful to keep my heart and mind open because we both were carrying a lot of extras with us. I asked Jack if he would still share wisdom with me if I started dating Harvey, he replied, "You got my number." At first, I thought he was referring to his phone number, but I realized he was implying much more.

My mother babysat my children when Harvey and I went out for a date, and she was a tremendous help. We would try to see each other about once a week at first, and Jane's support encouraged my heart upon discovering my dating. However, she insisted on meeting Harvey so she could give her approval, and I invited him to dinner at the house.

We were dating about three months when Harvey announced he was tired of hearing about Jack. I would either stop referring to Jack or introduce Harvey to Jack so he knew the context of my comments. The three of us had dinner together one weekend while the kids were at the exes', and then Jack became a friend to both of us. I dated Harvey for two years and until we were engaged,

I never let him get close to the kids emotionally. Our engagement was a year before we set a wedding date because I wanted to be sure both my children and his adjusted to the idea of us marrying. Harvey is a wonderful man, and Jane and Michael both loved the idea of me marrying him.

Harvey was a religious man who attended church every Sunday. Growing up in a house where we didn't attend church except on Easter and Christmas, I didn't know God. Harvey talked with me about God in glowing terms and I did my best to listen, but it made no sense. From the years Jack and I saw each other, I remembered he always had a Bible or other religious book. Meeting for lunch one day while the kids were in school and I was off work, we talked for almost two hours about God and religion.

Jack said many of the same things Harvey did about living forever and importance of being with God. I asked Jack, "How do you know if you're going to live forever?" and Jack started sucking on his lower lip.

I asked Jack about knowing God, hoping it was easier for him to answer, and Jack pondered aloud that both were very good questions. Jack had read many books on the subject and talked with many people, and his only response was "I guess you just know it." Never had I read the Bible, so Jack gave me a book on Calvinism and encouraged me to start. Calvin was a great thinker about God, and the book might help me to understand because I wanted to know God for my wedding vows.

The week before our wedding in the spring of 1999, I was home alone on a weekday. Harvey was at work, I didn't know where Jack was, the children were in school, Mom was off somewhere and I sat alone in a chair. Reading the Bible with Jack's book on Calvinism sitting beside me, I was growing weary of the lack of answers. While both were excellent sources for living within God's laws, neither told how to know and love God. I started to talk with myself in despair and eventually started talking with God.

I asked, "How do I get to know you, and what do you want from me?" and my own voice inside my head said, "Just love me." I thought about that short announcement for some time, "Just love me," and as I continued to talk to God, a warm feeling came over me. A tingling went down the side of my face, my heart started pounding, and I kept talking to God. Only after considering the statement, "Just love me," did I understand what it meant to love God and to have God love you.

Still crying with joy, I called Harvey and told him about God coming to me and opening my heart to love to Him. In that moment, the love and grace of God overflowed my existence with a joyful purpose. While I explained the transformation from God during the afternoon study, tears started streaming down my face a second time. Telling Harvey how much I loved him and how I could not wait to get married to him, I felt no fear of a second marriage.

Harvey declared jubilantly, "See? Prayers do come true. I prayed God would save you and He did." God saved me from my iniquities and God will shelter me in heaven throughout eternity. With this knowledge, a peace came over me and I knew from that point everything was going to

be all right. I knew difficult things would still happen to me, but I could as the Book of James calls out “count it all joy” with God at my side and in my heart.

I called Jack later that evening and revealed that God had transformed my life earlier in the day. Jack wanted to know my secret to finding God, and I said I just sat quietly and conversed with Him. I explained to God my feeling of longing to know Him and my confusion about not knowing Him. I’d always thought Jack knew God, but from his questions, it became apparent he did not. Being new at this religious stuff, I didn’t know what to say, and to tell you the truth, I’m still not sure what I said to him except to talk to God.

I went back and started reading the Gospel again and this time it had much more meaning to it. Occasionally Jack and I would talk about the Bible because I would read something but not understand the meaning and Jack would tell me what he thought it meant. If I still had questions, he would refer me to other books to read. After one of our discussions on the Bible, I asked Jack if he’d found God, and Jack simply replied, “Not yet.”

It was in the fall of 1999 when I got a call from Jack, and he sounded excited as if he’d just hit the lottery.

“What is it?” I exclaimed.

Jack rambled, “I found God—well, God wasn’t lost, and I was, so I guess God found me, but then again, He knew where I was. Anyway, I have accepted Jesus Christ as my savior. I’ve been speaking to God for the last six months as you suggested. My problem was I hadn’t been listening. You told me to talk with God, but you never mentioned to shut up and listen to what He was saying.”

We both started laughing, and when I asked about the peace you feel when the Holy Spirit takes hold of you, he answered with an awful rendition of “Amazing Grace.”

It was eight o’clock on April 11, 2002, after a two-day trip to a university Jane was hoping to attend. Harvey anxiously met us at the door with a sorrowful face that had miserable news written all over it. Looking at Jane, Harvey said it was about Jack, and without thinking I said, “Tell us.”

He told me he’d heard a rumor this morning that Jack passed away and I stuttered, “Is it true?” When Harvey confirmed the worst, the sound of my purse hitting the floor and everything pouring out of it didn’t matter. Just before we’d arrived home, Harvey had reached Jack’s house, and his son-in-law was there answering phone calls. Brian had stopped in at five to check on the house and had been answering phone calls all night to confirm the rumor. Thinking back to when I’d accepted God and finding that peaceful state, I knew everything would be okay after that. I accepted the situation, dealt with the loss, but still felt the pain of losing a good friend, and Harvey held me tight. Jane and Michael had both met Jack as a friend of the family and we talked about death and God.

A phone call came the next day from Brian to inform us there was a private viewing for close friends and I was more than welcome to come. I’d met Brian and Katherine at a picnic Jack had

organized at the local park as a fundraiser for a local charity. On Thursday night was a public viewing that Harvey wanted to attend. Jane and Michael both express it would be nice if the whole family attended. After the eulogy was over, Mary Osterhauf approached me. She told me some friends of Jack's were meeting at the diner next door and Harvey agreed to take the children home, so I joined the other women for dessert.

Jack was a good friend to my family and mentored me through a very difficult time in my life. If Sarah didn't preoccupy his heart, I probably would have married him. If that had happened, I would never know the wonderful man I did marry, though, and so God does have his plan for us. It's comforting to know Jack will be with his beloved Sarah again in God's house. I will miss Jack because he helped me through some tough times and I will miss those blue eyes as they listened to my problems. I knew from that Friday night I asked him to stay with me that I could trust Jack to do right by me, and he did.

Chapter 5 by Ms. Eddie Tobar

Jack's Third Girlfriend

It was the first Monday in April of 1996 and I was the assistant to the director of a not-for-profit organization to raise money for breast cancer. The organization had been formed a year earlier by a consortium of local businesspersons who wished to remain anonymous. Our first year, we managed to forward just one hundred and twenty-five dollars over the cost of running the organization to help women in our county. The previous Friday, the head of the consortium dismissed the old director. She had a degree in charitable management and had previously worked for United Way. One of the anonymous businesspersons, who were chairman of the board of the charity and chief corporate sponsor, introduced John "Jack" Brown that morning.

His first week as director, Jack didn't say much and stayed in his office observing everyone. The following Monday, he called everyone into his office as the first order of business. He let go two people, Cameron Diesel and Clare DuPont. Cameron was marketing coordinator and Clare was project coordinator. Cameron, who had graduated from Yale, worked part-time both here and with his marketing company. Clare had a sociology degree from Kent State. She worked part-time for the charity and managed a household full-time. Without consideration for either of their situations, Jack told them they were free to go.

Jack appointed Kandi Balicki as the new project coordinator. Kandi was a secretary with three children and a high school education and had not seen her husband in several years.

I would control marketing and development with help from Jack. The charity went from a director and five employees to a director and three employees. Jack went on to explain, "Everyone is replaceable, but if we work together, there will be no replacements."

He met with all the employees one by one and I was the first to meet with him individually. He asked if I had any questions, and after what I had seen that morning, I had plenty. Jack explained that he'd spent the first week observing who did what and how much they accomplished. The

two prim donnas didn't like to work and they were two peas in a pod who thought they were better than everyone else was. The results of any work they had performed during his first week were pitiful. My results were enough to keep me for the time being, but I would have to show better results in the near future.

He said, "It doesn't matter how hard you work if there's nothing to show for it at the end of the day." He told me about a friend of his named Ol' Joe and said that when he was in the Army, they had him move a pile of dirt in the morning and move it back in the afternoon. After a day of sweaty work, the pile of dirt stood where it had been in the morning and had nothing to show for it. We discussed my jobs at the charity, and I was very surprised by the depth and detail with which he described each job. I had until the next Monday to have at least four marketing ideas.

He requested Kandi for her assignments while asking having me stay and take notes as we will be working closely together. He told Kandi that her performance was excellent, but her duties were changing. He described Kandi's new responsibilities to the same detailed degree as mine. She received one week to generate a list of the projects the charity had run the first year and explain why they had failed. Jack assured her that either he or I would facilitate in finding the answer if she asked for help. After Kandi left the meeting, I asked Jack why her, and Jack had two valuable explanations. First, she needed the money, with three mouths to feed, and second, last week when she'd finished her work, she had gone looking for more.

The next day while I was waiting to talk to Jack, he received a call from a corporate sponsor. It was the owner of the local business and a friend of Clare, who was no longer working for the charity. The caller wanted to withdraw their donations from the charity. I heard Jack's side of the conversation, in which he calmly stated he would miss their money. Jack acted as if it was nothing to lose the account that helped covered our base salaries. After a long silence, Jack apologized and reiterated that we would miss them, especially with our upcoming events and marketing plans for corporate sponsors. Jack was silent for another moment, then replied, "No, we're planning to put our biggest corporate sponsors on all our letterhead and the front window for public recognition," then added, "You're correct, the dollar a year I make is probably more than I need."

Jack became relaxed after this point in the discussion. By the time the two finished talking, Jack had a lunch appointment with this corporate sponsor. He'd handled the heated situation with flair and confidence. I found out from the secretary that this sponsor was extremely angry when they called. Not only was Jack able to keep the sponsor, he got them to double their donation.

On Wednesday, I asked Jack about my ideas because I didn't think they were any good. Jack asked how they compared to my previous ideas, and I replied that no one had ever asked me for my ideas before. Then Jack logically questioned how I knew the ideas were no good if there were no comparable ideas in the past. If his expectations were four promising ideas, he would have hired a top agency in New York.

Come Monday, I thought three of my detailed ideas showed promise and the fourth was something I'd scribbled the night before. Jack, Kandi, and I sat together and discussed our assignments. It turned out that we kept only one of my promising ideas, and the scribbles from

the night before proved to be our first project. It was simple but effective, and it's still one of our best moneymakers. With the help of a local grocer, we sponsored a bake-off, featuring local favorites. All participants made two entries, one for the judges to judge, and one for us to sell. The judging for the entries was based on taste, appearance and local tradition. The first year, we got twenty-five entries, and this past year, we had over one hundred. The first year we made two hundred and ninety dollars from the entries and another five hundred in donations, with zero cost to us. This past year, with corporate sponsors, donations and the sale of entries, we cleared ten thousand dollars to help cancer victims in our county.

As spring turned into summer, we became very busy in the office. We had scheduled four major events for the year with plans to continue them if they worked. As the amount of work increased, so did productivity in the office. We accomplished more end goals with three focused people as a team than last year with five individual workers. As we accomplished our contrasting functions, we grew in confidence and were having more fun. Jack was right—it didn't matter how hard you worked if nothing was accomplished. By the end of the summer, our charity raised more money and awareness than we had the entire first year.

The first couple of months, Jack and I only had a professional relationship. That was more my fault than his because I was a little bitter about Jack taking over the charity. As the organization grew, so did my respect and admiration for Jack. Throughout the summer and into the fall, our relationship became more personal. It started by me asking about his wife, since he'd discussed her with others and I'd assumed she was alive. You could imagine my embarrassment to find out she had passed away five years before. He liked to talk about Sarah, and you could get him off any subject by mentioning her name. For the most part, our non-work-related discussions were safe topics during the summer and fall.

In mid-fall, Jack started having me join him for business lunches and dinners. At first, I thought it was his way of making up for a lack of pay, but then noticed he was working at these lunches. He met with contributors at most of them and talked a little or a lot of business. He always seemed to get his message through, because we'd get a check a few days later. As I became familiar with the nuances of courting donors, I could see how Jack got from saying hello to getting them to agree to give money. More often than not, they would walk away, thinking it was their own idea.

We had a potential sponsor cancel for lunch on a cold January day and Jack said we still must eat. We started by talking about my duties at the charity, and Jack said I was fishing for compliments and it wasn't becoming. "Don't ever show your fear," he said, explaining, "About a year ago I was having dinner with a friend, and he told me about this nonprofit. He explained the employees weren't doing well and they were losing as much money as they brought in. I asked, 'How hard is it to run a charity?' Before I agreed to become the next director, I had no idea how to run an organization like this one because I had no practical experience in dealing with the public. My company only sold to other manufacturing companies, and now I'm dealing with the public. I came into a new office in April and had to lay people off, to the disgruntlement of others. Believe me, there's a lot to fear with all the newness, and if I let the butterflies in my

stomach dictate my job, we wouldn't be doing any better than the past administration." He was saying, "Show confidence in all that you do, even though you're unsure of your abilities."

We were getting along well at lunch until we discussed politics. It is my belief that government's responsibility is to protect and help those who are in need. Jack believed a minimalist government served people best. I believe President Johnson's safety net established in the 1960s was the best thing to happen to America. Jack said "nets" only propose to trap things and President Johnson's Great Society had trapped many Americans in the welfare system. It was like the raccoons lining up to feed every morning behind the office because there was free food, so why should they forage for it? As the discussion heated up, I noticed he sat cool and collected. For every argument I inserted, he would calmly rebut and challenge my stance.

Arriving at the office from lunch and starting the afternoon's work, I realized the extent of the discussion we had. I remembered how I'd gotten a little angry in my debating. In past jobs, arguing with the boss usually meant not seeing the boss anymore and my position became stagnant. Jack peeked into my office and said he'd enjoyed the lively discussion earlier and we should do it again sometime, and it was a relief to hear him say this.

About once a week, we would gather, pick a political topic, and discuss it thoroughly. I never could rile him in any point, and I learned to stay composed in discussing matters.

The first week in March of 1997, Jack scheduled a meeting with the chairman of the board and me. In my two years of working for the charity, I met the chairman twice. The first day, when he'd introduced the original director, and a year ago, when Jack was hired. If tradition continued, we were getting a new director. We met at a local restaurant and Jack introduced me, explaining that March 31 was his last day because he earned his dollar. I was going to take over the directorship if I could pass this interview, he said, and he promptly left. I answered yes when the chairman asked me if I wanted the position, and then he told me I was the new director.

"Is this the interview?" I asked, and the chairman explained that Jack had highly recommended me and that was all I needed. The chairman told me how much more I would be making, and Jack had agreed to stay on as an advisor, so the chairman was doubling his pay.

When I arrived at the office after lunch, Jack was waiting for me to return. We went over my new responsibilities, and Jack asked who should move up into my position. I suggested Kandi, and Jack asked why. I said Kandi worked closely with me, understood my duties, and on occasion had done my job. Jack already knew the answer; he just wanted me to understand it. He invited me out for a congratulatory dinner. I said I should take him out since I was the new director, and Jack said on April 1 I could take him out.

The nicest restaurant in town was a block down the road from us and we arrived at six. There were several people ahead of us, but the host immediately greeted us by saying, "Hi, Jack." She escorted us to our table for two in front of the picture window with a view of the downtown square. From my seat, I could see a "gentleman" complaining at the host as kept pointing at Jack and me. He started for our table, and as he approached, I could hear him cussing about us taking his table. He claimed they had been waiting a half hour, but I had seen his group of four entering

the restaurant as we left our office, maybe a five-minute walk. The man's face was getting beet-red to the top of his bald head as he heatedly cussed at Jack's back.

After about a minute of this man cussing at us, Jack turned his head, looked at the man, and in a very cold voice stated, "Leave it alone."

This angry man took one step back and his scarlet face quickly became pallid with fear, then he walked away, grumbling under his breath. When Jack looked back at me, shivers went up my spine as those normally warm blue eyes had turned arctic and hostile. He gave an exaggerated blink and returned to the conversation as if nothing was wrong. In that brief flash, Jack's eyes were cold and barren, yet full of a lifetime of rage and anger. There was a storm of certainty, finality, and mortality in those blue eyes. I never saw his eyes so cold before or after this incident.

I told Jack about his eyes being so cold when he dealt with the irate man and what I felt when he looked back at me. Jack nonchalantly explained that it was a trick he'd learned to stay out of fights.

After I became director of the charity, Jack and I saw more of each other on a social basis. At first, I would put the dinner on our expense report because we did talk business. Then after one meal, I realized we hadn't talked any business and chose not to add the dinner to my account. Jack and I were as different as fruit and vegetables, yet there was something about him. I knew how a mosquito felt when drawn to the purple light and hitting the electric zapper. He was charming, intelligent, and handsome, and there was something very distinguished about him, which I found irresistible.

After a couple of months of social engagements, I wanted to kiss him goodnight. Getting home one night, I was furious with myself for not kissing him, and then I got furious with him for not wanting to kiss me. I kept telling myself we were business associates, and a person with a degree in psychology shouldn't feel this way. I felt like a teenager wanting an unsuspecting boy in study hall to like me. At our next meeting, I had more than my usual glass of wine, and as we were leaving, I grabbed Jack's hand, spun him around, and kissed him goodnight. Then I ran for my car and sat there like a frightened teenage girl with no idea what to do next, crying because my childish behavior had put me in an awkward position with a business associate. Knowing better than to kiss and run away doesn't change the yearning heart or the embarrassing situation caused by it.

Jack tapped on the glass and startled me, and something in his big blue eyes invited me to open the window. I tried to hide the tears from him, but they kept streaming down my face as I told myself to stop crying and sit up straight. Pushing the button to let down the window, I tried to compose myself and speak intelligently. Jack asked if I would like to talk about the strange ending to our meeting or leave it alone. My first thought was to call him a dummy for not taking me and kissing me back, and then I remembered I had run away, giving mixed signals. Without saying anything, I unlocked the doors so he could get in the car and talk about the incident.

Jack entered my compact car, saying that it was impolite to kiss a man and run off. Maybe it was the nervousness of the moment or knowing he didn't hate me, but his comment started me laughing. We sat and talked about fifteen minutes about my kiss-and-run before I suggested a cup of coffee. We drove around for an hour, not really looking for the cup of coffee as we talked. We did discuss my concealed affections for him, and I didn't feel like a little girl anymore. I was going to invite him home but figured it was better to save the invitation for another night. He touched me gently on the face with his rough finger and kissed me back before leaving the car. The remembrance of his tender embrace on my chin felt delightful all the way home.

Calling me up the next evening, he invited me to a "boy-girl" date that Friday night. We dated for a couple months before I invited him home for the night. I had known several men through my fifty years of life, but none of them had moved me the way that Jack did. He had an innate way of knowing just what to do to satisfy me in bed and in life. The more we dated, the more provoking he became and the more interesting he appeared to me.

After a year of dating, I started looking for more than what we had and asked myself if he could be my soul mate. I took a vacation with a girlfriend of mine on a cruise to give me a chance to think about Jack without his eyes distracting me. I found myself competing against Sarah, his wife, realizing that in his mind, he was still married to her and I was a mistress. For an instant, I thought of ways to steal him from her, but how was I to compete against someone who was dead? How could life with me be more fulfilling than memories of her and their twenty-five years together? These two piercing reflections summed up my unique dilemma. The more I thought about the situation between Jack and me, the more I wondered about Sarah. Jack spoke about Sarah to others, but we only discussed her marginally.

Returning from vacation, I told Jack my feelings regarding our continued relationship. I explained my feeling about being a mistress and how I could never have a large part of Jack. Jack concurred with my assessment of our relationship. The sentimental half of me was hoping Jack would lie to me and promise to be with me forever. When Jack asked if we could still be friends, I agreed. I had heard this line in the past and found previous lovers were only trying to stay near to me until I changed my mind, but there was something very trustworthy in Jack, especially those blue eyes.

I asked Jack to tell me about Sarah to satisfy my curiosity. Jack's blue eyes twinkled as he regaled me with stories regarding Sarah's life. I would still meet with Jack once a week for business, and then he liked to tell stories of the two of them together. Generally, the business would take ten to fifteen minutes, and for the rest of lunch, we talked about Sarah or our lives in general. His heart became lighter as he told his loving stories about her. My favorite story was about Sarah becoming CEO.

Jack illustrated, "Sarah and I were married a couple years, and I had worked for her father for ten years. Intricate Stamping Company was losing sales every year in a shrinking automotive market. I wanted to get into other markets, but her father refused. I was letting off steam to Sarah one night about the situation, and she said, 'Buy the business from Dad.' I thought she was either making a point or joking with me, but she was serious. Sarah was the only daughter of an only

daughter and only had one daughter. When her grandfather passed away, he left his entire estate to Sarah. We were saving the hundred thousand dollars for retirement and promised each other not to spend it, but Sarah insisted, and between the money I had saved and her inheritance, we had the down payment for the business. We went to her father, and he agreed to sell the business to us. I would have come to that conclusion on my own, but Sarah realized the destination and pushed me towards it. Sarah stated that since she'd put up the most money to buy the company, she was CEO, and I could have any other position I wanted. So remember, despite what you might hear from other people, I didn't make her CEO."

Jack should have appeared in a Broadway theater with the stories he narrated about Sarah. You could see Sarah's strength and resolve as he illuminated her character. To hear Jack tell it, she was the boss of him, yet when you listened to his accounting of their lives together, they'd shared equally in the marriage. Hearing him say one time he was like a puppet on a string with her, I indicated his personality wouldn't let him be a puppet for anyone. I even reiterated some of his stories to show where they both got a lot and both gave a lot to the marriage. They had an understanding as to who was responsible in any given situation. I don't think it was anything spoken, yet power in the household was shared. I had been married twice before and didn't recall having our roles so well defined. Jack could only remember two serious arguments they'd ever had, and one was before they were married.

Jack showed Sarah's playful side as he told me, "I was on the couch reading when Sarah lay down next to me with her feet on my lap. After a couple of minutes, she started rubbing my side and leg with her toes. It felt good and was somewhat annoying since I was trying to read an article. This went on for about five minutes when she mischievously called out, 'Big dummy!'" And I turned and saw her blouse and pants undone. Big dummy was her secret pet name for me when I missing the passes she threw at me. I asked where Katherine was, and Sarah just said, 'Gone, left, out of here,' and this news was a pleasant surprise for me."

Although Sarah was strong and playful, she was sentimental as well. My second favorite depiction was one Jack entitled, "Being able to achieve the same results on our twentieth anniversary as we did on our wedding day." Jack painted the picture this way, "The story begins in the spring of 1987. Sarah mentioned our twentieth anniversary was approaching and wanted to know what I had planned. 'It's only been twenty years?' I exclaimed and the comment almost slipped by without a response. Then she asked me if I would like to rephrase my statement. Searching my mind for a quick save, I remembered reading an article about a couple renewing their vows and suggested, 'How about we renew our vows?' The key to being a good husband is the trouble avoided when saying or doing something he should not.

"We initially planned a small ceremony involving maybe ten people, family and close friends. Gail found out and invited herself and the next thing I knew the whole office was attending with dates. Terrell Jenkins mentioned it to the plant, and all the workers were attending. Sarah mentioned it at church, and many church friends wanted to attend. Within a couple weeks, the number grew to over five hundred people attending our private little wedding. We decided to accommodate all who were interested. Sarah was a co-chairwoman for a house for unwed mothers, and we asked all gifts be directed to this charity. We ran into a snag when the pastor

pointed out the church only held three hundred people. Since it was mid-June, the pastor suggested we have an outdoor wedding. We found a caterer who could manage seating and feeding the five hundred people for our small family renewal of vows.

“The Monday before our vows, Sarah took my band from my left ring finger. It was twenty years since the band had been off my finger and the gold shrunk through the years of marriage. She explained that since she’d had no say in the wedding bands twenty years ago, she was buying the bands for this wedding. I requested her hand in marriage on a Friday night and the next morning I bought her a diamond ring. My bad assumption was that the groom buys the rings, and I got a great deal by buying the engagement ring and both bands at the same time. Apparently, the bride-to-be picks the rings out and the groom pays for them—that was the proper sequence. Since I’d surprised her with the rings for our first marriage, she was going to surprise me with the rings for our renewed vows. I asked Sarah about strange women hitting on me this week without my band on my finger. She told me to tell the lascivious women chasing me that I had a wife who would kick both their butt and mine.

“I felt very little nervousness until the morning of the wedding. We had been married for twenty years, and yet there was an anxiety surrounding the day. Katherine was Sarah’s maid of honor, and she chased me out of the house at nine a.m., stating that the groom shouldn’t see the bride before the wedding. Ol’ Joe, my best man, there to pick me up, met secretly with Sarah in the spare room where the wedding dress was laid out. We went to his house to relax and partook in a midmorning drink and a midafternoon lunch together. I asked him for Sarah’s rings, and he indicated the damage that could befall him if he did that. The rings would remain a surprise until the pastor requested them for our fingers.

“The wedding vows went smoothly with no tonged-tied moments and we had a grand reception. Twenty years before, we got to our hotel room at one and lay on the bed resting and talking. Glancing at the clock at two, I dozed off for just an instant, then woke up at five to find the lights were all on and Sarah was sleeping. I turned off the lights before returning to sleep and she woke me up at eight with a first married morning kiss. She stated I had fallen asleep and she was going to turn off the lights, but she fell asleep as she rolled over to do it.

“The night of our second nuptials, we made it to the hotel at ten and talked until she fell asleep at eleven.”

I asked what the great surprise was about the new wedding rings, and he explained, “The pastor who presided over the ceremony reached the rings observance, and she put mine on me first. It looked like the same ring, only new, and it fit better, and I hoped she didn’t pay a lot for the rings. Then Ol’ Joe handed me her rings, and as I opened the case I immediately recognized them. I’d bought the engagement ring twenty years earlier. One of the gold-mounted brackets holding the diminutive diamond in place had broken off the first week she wore it. I placed the same broken bracket diamond ring on her fourth finger of her left hand.

“The pastor said she had something to say and I can still remember her words.

“The jeweler where Jack bought the rings twenty years before agreed to take them as trade-in on new rings. I went looking at the modest rings first, and they were okay, but then I remembered how well we were doing and looked at the superior jewelry. I picked a large diamond engagement ring and two heavy gold bands and was prepared to buy them. But then I made the mistake of opening the boxes with our old rings. The jeweler must have seen the memories in my eyes, because he offered to make the old rings look new. I told him not to fix the engagement ring because it led to twenty happy years and it will lead us to another twenty years.’

“The pastor looked at me for a response, and I replied that she’d said it all in her self-written vows. At bedtime, I asked why she hadn’t gotten the expensive jewelry without trading in the old rings. She replied that the fancy rings didn’t have the luster our rings did, so the next Christmas, I bought her a very nice necklace from this jeweler.”

Jack was also sentimental, although he preferred to show his crusty outside. It didn’t take much digging to see his soft and tender side under the thin veneer of grumpiness. He told me, “When Katherine was twelve and entering the seventh grade, her interests had changed. Sarah and Katherine were the best of friends and the worst of enemies in the same relationship, half the time fighting and the other half telling secrets. I wanted to stop Katherine from arguing with her mom, but Sarah said no, stay out of it. I lamented to Sarah one evening about feeling left out of Katherine’s life.

“We were finishing supper one night when Katherine mentioned math was giving her problems she couldn’t solve and she wanted her mother to help her. Sarah pronounced that she’d majored in poli sci and knew nothing of math with letters in it. If Katherine required help with math homework, she would have to see me because I work with numbers every day.

“I thanked Sarah as we went to bed that night, because Sarah was very good in math and would know more about algebra. Remembering taking algebra in junior high doesn’t help, and I had to relearn the subject as Katherine spent time with me almost every night.”

Jack and I were never intimate again although the thought did cross my mind. We stopped seeing each other on an intimate level in May of 1998. We remained close friends, and as a colleague, I wanted to surprise him on his birthday. I finished at the office at five and got to Jack’s house by six. Upon arriving, I noticed the house wide open, and from the front door I saw Jack asleep on the couch. A bottle of whiskey, less than half-full, was on the coffee table in front of him. Next to the bottle was a receipt from that afternoon from a liquor store in town. There was an empty glass with an empty ice bucket to the other side of the bottle. At the other end of the coffee table was his wallet, keys and reading glasses stacked neatly in a pile.

Jack was lying twisted on the couch as if he’d slumped over from a seated position. Wedged between him and the back cushion of the sofa was a framed picture of Sarah. He had shown me this picture on several occasions and it was my impression it was his favorite.

There was no need for a night on the town since it was quite apparent he’d had plenty of cheer for one night. Thinking his bed would be a more comfortable place to rest, I nudged him to wake

up, which startled him. He snorted and then called out “Sarah,” then reality struck him and he gave me a dazed look and said, “Oh, it’s you.”

I helped him upstairs to his room as he rambled about not knowing I was coming. I started to clean up the living room when I noticed some papers that had been beneath him on the couch. In the papers, I found a newspaper clipping of Sarah’s obituary. Reading the article, I realized the sad news that they had laid Sarah to rest on his birthday. Thinking back, I realized I had never seen him on his birthday and never seen him under the influence before or after that day. I also never tried to surprise him on his birthday again. He called me the next day to apologies for his drunken state the night before.

Jack advised me on matters for both personal and business relationships. Learning various lessons from Jack changed my life because he saw more potential in me than I saw in myself. I was married twice and never held a position for more than two years before meeting Jack. My life became meaningless, and significant and meaningful employment was out of reach for me. Always blaming other people for my woes, I heard of a glass ceiling keeping women down and kept this conception as a security blanket. Whenever anything went wrong at a job, I could blame the glass ceiling, and without my consent, Jack showed me how to do better.

In my previous positions, getting home from a long workday made me wonder if it was all worth it. Now upon arriving home from a fulfilling position, I think about all the accomplishments during the day. The significance of my occupation is in the accomplishment of daily goals. It doesn’t matter how hard you work, if the objectives are accomplished, then there is satisfaction. Jack taught me this was being goal-oriented, as opposed to work-oriented, because work without goals is meaningless.

The changes in my personal relationships proved positive when a man started me dating on a regular basis. If a problem or annoyance entered a past relationship, I would ignore it in hopes of it going away. Jack taught me that confronting these irritants as they happened kept them from growing into cancers eating away the relationship. All the debates on sensitive subjects with Jack taught me to remain calm and collected even through passionate issues. My sixteen-year-old niece met with me and said I was a good listener. I don’t remember anyone calling me a good listener before. I married the man a month after Jack passed away, and through our positive conversations, we have defined our roles in the marriage.

Late morning of April 11, 2002, I was going through the first quarter budget results that had just arrived at my desk. The previous January, Jack had predicted lower results from the year before because of 9/11. We had a five percent increase in revenue for the first quarter, and it was the first time Jack’s predictions had not come to fruition. I thought to myself, “We’ll meet for lunch and I can rub his nose in the bad prediction and the great results of the first quarter.”

Jeannine, our new secretary, told me the chairman was on the phone, which caused my heart to stop because he called so rarely. He interrupted my day and called me at the office so I didn’t get the news elsewhere. My heart just sank in my chest from the tone of his frightful warning, and it broke when he told me Jack had passed away that morning. I’m sure he told me the details of the death, but they didn’t register in my brain, and I felt numb all over. I had learned in a psychology

class that the human brain could not go blank and it must think of something at all times, but my mind was blank for a long moment.

Jeannine was in my office calling for Kandi when my brain activated again. I called everyone in the office for an impromptu meeting. I'd heard Jack talk about God in the past and it had never bothered me. He made it a point not to preach to me but always seemed to get a message to me about God. Raised in a home where God was a word you used as an acceptable form of cussing, I found myself asking this God of Jack's for help. A warm comfort came over me so I could verbalize the phone call from the chairman.

Wanting to close the office for the day, Jeannine offered to stay and I gave her a key to lock up at the end of the night. Jeannine had only met Jack on one occasion but understood the feeling the rest of us had for him. Before saying goodbye, Jeanine said a prayer for God to comfort us and the warm feeling came over me again. The next couple of months I searched for the feeling again and began by reading the Bible. I sought the church Jack had attended, and the preacher and I discussed God and Jesus all afternoon. When we were finishing, he asked if I wanted to pray the prayer of forgiveness and acceptance. With the preacher leading me, I knew Jesus by the end of the prayer.

My new husband, who asked me to keep him out the book, is now attending church with me and I am waiting patiently for God to touch him. Jack's passing taught me there is good in dying because only by dying from the flesh can a person live with God. Another benefit of Jack's unexpected death, it forced my heart to seek God in a very troubling moment. Jack was a good friend, lover and business associate. I pray he and Sarah are together again in God's kingdom for all of eternity.

Chapter 6 by Mary Osterhauf

Jack's Last Girlfriend

I was married for twenty years until 1990, when my husband left me for someone else. We hadn't lived as husband and wife for some time, and his leaving me for another never bothered me. We even stopped fighting during the last years, and when my youngest went to college, we divorced. Knowing the stigma of being a divorced woman hurt more than his leaving the broken home. I moved to a small township south of Medina and the local church accepted me into the community. I met briefly with Sarah Brown on several occasions and met Jack once in 1991. For the past ten years, I nursed with a hospice for terminally ill patients.

In 1997, the county hospital asked our hospice if we could help them set up a nursing supervision for home care. Apparently, they'd received equipment as a gift several years earlier and the hospital was not to charge for the use of the equipment. It was the hope of the hospital leaders to use this equipment for terminally ill patients wishing to die at home. They told us the equipment came from a donor named John Brown whose wife had died at home in 1991. It worked well for the family, and recently another family had made a similar request.

They assigned me to this family using the donated equipment, and we set up a room at the home to care for the dying person. Just after the New Year started, this cancer victim perished in their loving home and surrounded by family. The whole experience impressed both the family and hospice administrators. We submitted the final report of the home hospice to the hospital, and they were pleased with the outcome. They wanted to work together to create an organization to help other families in this position. They asked me to head up this organization because I worked the home hospice and possessed the most knowledge on the subject.

The hospital administration arranged a meeting between Mr. Brown and me. It turned out Mr. Brown was the same Jack Brown I'd met many years ago when I'd started at church in my little town. After socializing for a while, we got down to business. He pointed out all the benefits of hospice care at home and how his advantage in life had allowed him to be with Sarah every day. When we finished the meeting, Jack told me to call anytime for help with this project.

It was agreed by all the entities that we would require some financial help if we were going to make this program available to average- and low-income families. When the insurance companies found out it would cost less than a nursing home, they agreed to fund our project. Hearing that Jack was influential in fundraising projects, I asked him to help. He agreed to help set up a charitable company for this project, with the two principal owners of the company being the hospital and the hospice.

After a year of working on this project, Jack had a working organization. We had corporate donors and several fundraisers a year planned. I transferred to the organization as technical advisor, and we got our first family to use our service. They had at least one family member who stayed home at all times, so the patient would not be alone in her final days. I made weekly trips to the house to refill the medicine dispenser, verify the condition of the patients, and answer any questions. As the patient grew closer to the end, my visits became more frequent, and I even stayed with the patient to relieve the family. At any given time, we would have anywhere from two to five families participating in our home hospice for the terminally ill.

Jack and I started dating in the summer of 1999 after several hints by me and he agreed to my terms. I insisted he would have to visit church every Sunday if we were going to date. Even if he was a nonbeliever, I only dated men who attended church on a regular basis. I made an instant hit with his daughter by showing up one Sunday morning holding his arm. It was the first Sunday in September, and while everyone was taking communion, Jack was on his knees praying. The pastor dismissed the congregation, and everyone slowly meandered out of the worshipping hall. I wanted to leave, but Jack was still on his knees, and I knew not to disturb him seeing him consumed in prayer. He knelt there as if he were in a trance, not praying and not doing much of anything. As the tears began to run down his face, he continued to kneel facing the cross. Five minutes after the service let out, he sat back in the chair next to me, took a deep breath, and cried, "That's what it's all about."

The pastor came over to see if he could help, and the three of us discussed the experience Jack had just underwent. I have always believed in God, and as far back as I can remember, God has been with me. I never knew how powerful the feeling of first meeting God could be until I saw

Jack accept God alone. Jack would acknowledge the unknown God, but now the loving God had mended his broken heart. Jack admonished the pastor for not telling him Jesus had died on the cross for him personally. I thought the snide comment was insulting, but the pastor just chuckled as Jack smiled at him. When I asked Jack about his comment later in the day, he pointed out there wasn't a Sunday where the pastor hadn't mentioned Jesus dying for him.

After this, Jack became more open about his emotions. Talking about our lives while on dates, we included our yesteryear marriages. Our lives mirrored each other's, except he'd had a magnificent marriage and mine had ended in tragedy. When discussing his life together with Sarah, his heart floated with joyous delight. His blue eyes would tinkle with happiness that animated his speech during his stories.

His stories were mostly positive, and I asked if there were any troubled times between them. He explained the closest they had come to having a tough time was the Friday after their first Thanksgiving. He told the story this way. "I went to use the bathroom and as usual there was little to no paper on the roll. I thought it was a good to change the roll, but about an hour later, Sarah came out of the bathroom complaining about how I put the roll on the spindle. The paper should come from behind, up and over so you pull the paper from the top, she complained. When I was single, the paper was on either the sink counter or the back of the toilet, and I only put it on the spindle when cleaning up for a date. To me it was more important to have paper available to use than how it was on the roll.

"I should have left well enough alone and said, 'Okay, it won't happen again,' but I opened my mouth. I lived for four years in my own apartment and in those four years I used two rolls of paper and the second was only half-used when I moved out. How did she manage to use a whole roll every week, I complained back to her. She spouted back that it lasted longer than a week, and I clarified we'd bought a twelve-pack at Labor Day, and Thanksgiving weekend we're looking for more. 'What, are you counting the sheets I use?' she demanded, and I replied harshly, 'No, but it is a lot to use.' 'I must dry myself every time I pee,' she explained, and I should not have added, 'Do you have to wrap your hand like a mummy to do it?'

"Well, we got into every little annoyance we had for each other, and they all came out over the next couple of hours. I did this and she did that, then she wanted to know why I used so much soap while showering. At times, she was yelling at me and at other times, we discussed quietly. During one of the extreme discussions, she said I must not love her if she was so terrible. This was the one and only time I ever raised my voice at her, and I yelled, 'Don't ever question my love again.' I didn't know why, but the comment really hurt, and I staggered to the garage. There was a bag of old clothes setting on the workbench waiting to go to Goodwill, and I punched it, then slapped it and started kicking it all around the garage.

"She came out about ten minutes later and I was sitting on the bumper of the car. She trembled with fear and approached cautiously because I have this bar trick with my eyes when I get angry. It scares people and has saved me from fights on several occasions. She apologized for her comment and we hugged. I didn't know it at the time but it was only the end of round one, for we were sitting on the couch for an hour not saying much of anything. Then I stuck my foot in it

by saying, 'I don't know why it's so important to have the roll come from the top.' Round two has started, and we argued most of the night, going to bed with a begrudging 'I love you' from both ways.

"Round three started at nine a.m. Saturday morning just after breakfast. It took me five months of living with her to learn how to lift the seat, now she's complaining I don't put the seat down, and I yelled she doesn't put it up when she's done. She complained the porcelain was cold, and I questioned whether she dropped her britches outside and backed into the john. How else do you explain sitting on cold porcelain, because even drunk, I have never sat on cold porcelain. Is that it? You're drinking? And we argued about the cold porcelain for a while before she brought up subjects that were closed the previous day.

"We missed lunch because of our fight. It was midafternoon and there was a calm in the storm. Sarah answered her mother's call and was pleasant and charming with her mother after twenty-four hours of yelling at me. She told her mother everything was going great but we wouldn't be able to come for Sunday dinner. Then I did what I should have done from the very beginning and conceded the loss, telling her there was nothing of any value to our argument and I couldn't promise to put the roll on the paper properly on the spindle. I couldn't promise to put the seat down each time. I couldn't promise to put my clothes in the hamper every time. 'What I can promise you is the promise made on our wedding day, that I will love you until the day I die plus eternity. I will try to remember all the things I cannot promise and try to accomplish these things, as you want.' I don't know if I said something right or she was just tired of fighting, but she started crying and gave me a big hug. Figuring out why her comment on Friday hurt so much, I discovered I loved her that much. I never took our love casually again and thinking back, I believe this is what she was arguing. By me dismissing her wants, I was dismissing her.

"We made up that night and again on Sunday. Monday morning, Mr. Sterling, my father-in-law, called me into his office. He indicated we made up and I sat there for a moment wondering how he knew. I guess he could tell by the look on my face and explained it was her mother's phone call on Saturday. Sarah was extraordinarily pleasant and civil with her mother. He pointed out the two are completely different because they're identically the same. The two have bickered for the past ten years and Sarah has never really been amiable to her mother in that time. Then he asked me if I gave into her and then answered, 'Of course you did, you made up.' He apologized to me for not remembering my dad had passed away and he should have advised me on marriage. He told me when a man marries a woman, he has to remember one thing: 'your ass belongs to her' from that date forward. There are certain things a wife is going to demand and there are issue she willing to negotiate, and there are a few items a man can determine. Your job as a husband is finding out what each is. And I asked somberly, 'Could not you just tell me?' He replied that that was the fun of being married, finding out who was in charge in any situation. He added that Sarah and her mother were probably talking about us right now. They would be friends now that Sarah has a common problem with her mother, hardheaded husbands. I mentioned the toilet paper, and he laughed and said, 'Come from behind, up and over so you pull the paper from the top.' Dad added if I wanted to know what Sarah would be like in twenty-five

years, look at her mother. Whenever Sarah and I were picking on each other, I always had the trump of calling her Elena, her mother's name."

When he finished telling the story, there was a pregnant pause and he gasped, "I still love her, and I miss her." In several years of seeing Jack, this was the first time I'd heard him admit how much he loved her. From the stories he told, his love for her came through, but now he was verbally admitting the love and the pain. I work with families who have a person dying, and Jack seemed to be going through the stages of grief. He was starting to accept her passing after more than eight years as a widower.

I did witness the bar trick with his eyes on a disturbing evening in the farthest reaches of the county. There was an elderly couple using our service, and the woman had been fighting cancer for five years. Recently the doctors admitted there was nothing more they could do for her and she expressed a preference to finish her life at home if possible. The doctor referred her to our company and we made the arrangements to grant her final wish. He agreed to retire to be with her until the end, fulfilling one of our requirements. Their daughter lived in Medina, which was about fifteen miles from their house, and could relieve the newly retired man on occasion. Their son, still in the Navy, still lived in the San Diego area and agreed to come for a visit to see his dying mother.

I relieved the husband once a week so a friend picked him up to spend time away from the house. His daughter would come over and relieve him periodically. This was working without problems until the son returned from California for a visit. His mother had just started IV treatment for the pain as she entered the final stages of the cancer. We got a call from the father on a Friday at five asking for our help, and Jack offered to drive me over there.

As the car drove down the country driveway, the son met us by cussing like the proverbial sailor. The son, in total despair, claimed he did not require our presence at the house and we should just go back where we'd come from. The father's tears streamed down his face because of his son's tirade, and Jack stayed in the car as instructed. Meanwhile, I was trying to talk with the young man about his mother's condition, and he was getting more and more belligerent. He kept calling his dad a cheap SOB that wouldn't spend the money to save Mom's life and saying if he spent a little money, it would save her.

When I tried to convince him of the reality of his mother's condition, he jumped in my face with rage in his eyes and called me a bitch. In the blink of an eye, Jack slid between us. "Back off," he said emotionlessly, and the big guy backed up.

We had a fundraiser a couple of months before and several new members of the Cleveland Browns hosted the event. The son, who equaled the size of these players, backed down from his aggressive posture because of Jack's bar trick eyes and stern voice. Jack continued to speak at him in a voice that was totally devoid of any emotion. The look on the son's face blazed with the fear of death, and whatever Jack did with his eyes scared the big man. His father, who had feared for his and my safety, now feared for his son's safety and well-being. The father saw Jack's fierce face and his son's frightened reaction and pleaded with Jack not to harm his son.

Jack's voice gained compassion as the son started to listen to reason. The sheriff appeared and remained back to watch the events unfolded. The deputy appeared captive to Jack's words as Jack told the son, "Your mom is mostly dead. Cancer has eaten a good portion of her body and your mom chose to live out her final days in the house she called home for over forty years. All you have left is your dad, and have you considered the pain your father has at this moment? I know his pain and anguish because I lost my Sarah to cancer almost ten years ago. Picture you losing your wife—go on, close your eyes and picture her with cancer and the doctors all say there's nothing more they can do. That's your mother dying in the house and she stopped being number one to you when you married your wife, but she's still number one to your father. I see an old woman dying in the house and your father sees the love of his life dying in the house. Instead of supporting your father, you want to rip his heart out by not allowing him to grant your mother's last wish—which is to die in the house she calls home. You're tearing her away from the memories of raising you into a strong man, your sister into a wonderful mom, and growing old with your father. Now you want to take her from your father with your childish outburst to change the unchangeable. You claim to have the money to save her and will to spend all you have for her life. Go, offer your life savings to your mother and see what she tells you. Give her the money and write the check! I promise you that your father would give everything he owned to save your mother. He would be willing to live in a cardboard box the rest of his life if it would save your mother."

When Jack finished his sermon, the son was in tears and his father stood with his arms open wide as the son fell into the father's chest, weeping uncontrollably. I turned to the deputy, who had his hankie out brushing his nose, and asked if there was to be any action taken. Clearing his throat, the deputy choked out that it depended on us and said there was no evidence of any violence. If there was no one willing to press charges, there would be no further action on his part. And the old man took a hand off his son's back and waved the cop away.

I checked on the mother, who had slept through the whole incident, and the father demanded no one tell her about what happened here today.

Later, the father thanked Jack for his help in calming his son and making him understand the gravity of the situation. The two talked quietly for a while regarding family, cancer, and the death of a loved one. When the son finished visiting with his mother, he hugged Jack and offered apologies to everyone for his behavior. When I talked with the daughter a couple of days later, she asked if Jack had made the story up or really lived it, and I assured her it was all too real for him.

A couple weeks after Jack's salvation, we went to eat at a restaurant Jack half-owned. A year before, a young man had approached Jack with a detailed plan for a restaurant in downtown Medina. This young man told me a couple weeks after Jack passed away about how he got into business with Jack. The young man had trained in New York to be a chef and worked in a restaurant there for several years to save some money. He was never happy in New York and decided to move back to the Medina. He had an idea to open a New York-style restaurant in Medina but need more capital to do so. He presented several prominent businesspersons with a written business plan to achieve his goals. Jack was the only financier that called him, and then

Jack verbally ripped his plans to shreds as they read it. After Jack ripped the young man's plans, the cost for opening his dreams went from two hundred thousand dollars to three hundred thousand. The young man financed fifty percent through a bank, and Jack became fifty percent owner of the restaurant. There was a survivor benefit written into the agreement, and the young man is now donating Jack's profits to several charities in the community.

After dinner, Jack ordered his usual drink, a glass of twelve-year-old Jack Daniels with two ice cubes in it. I never saw him empty the glass of libation, but he liked to sip it over time. Curious, I asked how it was, and he slid the glass over and said to try it. My face must have shown my disdain and he told me to swirl my finger in the glass and taste your finger. At his insistence, I swirled and tasted the twelve-year-old beverage and it was surprisingly tasty.

Being curious, I asked why he'd agonized over her after all these years. He'd explained on more than one occasion that he had asked God why her, because he was the one who drank and cussed. Jack pondered aloud whether, if he'd believed and trusted in God, she would still have had to die well before they could grow old together. From when they'd first met, Jack had recognized that her faith in God was profound; he could see it in her eyes.

He expounded, "Since meeting her, I wanted the feeling she had when praying to God. I hoped her faith was strong enough for both of us, and I tried to fill the emptiness of not knowing God with her love. Lucky for me, my love for her was strong enough to fill most of the void for twenty-five glorious years. I don't pretend to know the mind of God, but I speculated God might have taken her to show me that even her love can leave me and only His love is eternal. For as long as she was alive and loved me genuinely, my heart wasn't open to anything else. Occasionally I suspect my lack of faith killed her. After she died, I knew if we were going to be together again, I would have to find God. I prayed to the almighty to let me be with Sarah throughout eternity. Trying to make deals with God, I promised to give all I own, all I ever would make, to charity, if He would just let me be with her. All my negotiating with God showed me He was not for sale and left me more bereaved than before.

"Someone told me to talk with God and I begged and pleaded with God to be with Sarah again. Reasoning with God, I volunteered to do His work to be with Sarah in heaven and yet nothing. You talked me into attending church again and that only showed me how grave the situation had become. Wanting God to choose me, I was willing to undertake any work or project He deemed worthy. A few weeks ago while sitting in church, I asked God, 'Why not me, for I am a proud man who will serve you proudly?' Reaching my wits' end and having nothing more to add, I decided if I got no reply, I would resolve not to be with God. I sat there in my chair waiting for a response from God as to my life in eternity.

"'Why would God want my money?' crossed my mind, causing a confusion and clarity at the same time. God is God, who doesn't need any material treasure I can give Him, and this thought really hurt me. If there is no worldly fortune I can give to influence God's decision, then what is the path to heaven?

"I looked up to see the pastor pointing at the cross and he preached that I should pray for forgiveness of all my sins. Getting on my knees and staring at the cross, I considered the

sacrifice Jesus made for everyone. Then, hearing Sarah's voice say, "For you, big dummy," I realized God didn't want anything but my love and me. There was no bargaining and no dealing with God and I would have to love Him on his terms with all my heart.

"In a way, Sarah saved me again that providential Sunday morning. If something was bothering me, I could hide it from everyone but her, and she always knew when I was hurting. She had an intrinsic ability to point out the problem interfering with my life and make me discuss it. It was if I was transparent and she could see exactly what it was and make me talk about it. When we first bought Intricate Stamping Company, we had some hard times where success was doubtful. Money was tight and getting into new markets wasn't as easy as I'd thought, and I worried about losing the company. Holding me tight one night, she told me not to worry, for it was in God's hands, and I cried like a baby in her arms. Whether I was sick, worried, or scared, she was there for me, and that fateful Sunday morning, she was there for me again. I realize her voice was a memory of days gone by, but she was there for me and she shut my mouth, making me listen to God. By God's grace and Jesus's love for me, I am saved."

Jack gulped the rest of the libation and slammed his glass on the table with tears starting down his face. As he sat stone-faced and silent, waiting for me to say something, I was drawing a blank. Pulling all the cash out of my purse, I threw it on the table and suggested we go for a walk, discovering the next day that Jack had a tab billed monthly and the owner returned the money to me. We walked in the cold night air for several blocks before Jack said that it was a nice night for a walk. Thinking it was a little cold, I agreed with what he said because of the momentous breakthrough in his emotions that evening.

My conclusion that poignant night at the restaurant was that I would have to share Jack with Sarah. To separate Sarah and Jack was impossible because Jack was who he was because of Sarah. Requesting that Jack disregard Sarah would be asking him to give up part of himself. He would never be over Sarah, and likewise I didn't want to become Sarah either. For me to try to fill Sarah's position in his life, I would have to destroy who I was. I think Jack kept the other women in his life at arm's length to protect his memories of Sarah. I noticed the next day Jack had taken off his wedding ring, leaving a white circle of memory on his finger. He realized that no matter what happened in his life, he would always have those twenty-five years he spent with Sarah.

When Sarah died, it left a huge void in his life, and when he found Jesus and accepted Him as his savior, this filled the void and put his heart to rest. He no longer needed to cling to the memory of Sarah for his happiness. Only God's redeeming love for him could make him give up his illusory love for Sarah. Our relationship grew closer in the next couple of years. It was September 12, 2001, and the whole country was in shock from the day before. Jack brought my favorite lunch to my office and he talked passionately through the meal.

He began by saying, "When Sarah died, I couldn't see myself loving another person. I had two deep loves in my life, Sarah and Katherine, and with Sarah gone, it left me with one. The Thanksgiving after Sarah died, Katherine was getting ready to go to college and I wouldn't be seeing her as much. I made it a point to start telling her how much I loved her and make sure she

understood this love. We played this game of saying “LuvYa” to each other, and starting that morning, I began saying ‘I love you’ so she would know how much I loved her.

“With the attack on the country and the uncertainty of war approaching us, I think it is important to tell you ‘I love you.’ You have meant a lot to me over the last couple of years, and I didn’t want the chance for me to tell you to slip away. I love you.”

It left me speechless, and before I knew what happened, the subject changed and we were talking about the impending war. I did respond “I love you too” as he departed after the touching lunch conversation. There was a moment during lunch when I thought he was going to ask me to marry him, but the subject never came up again.

April 10, 2002, was a busy day for me and in addition to my scheduled stops, a family living at the county edge requested I make a special trip to see them. Having to go by the office to get home, I decided to stop for a moment and check for messages. While I was still in the parking lot, the secretary ran to my car with an urgent message for me. For the past hour, she had been trying to reach me on my cell phone but it had gone directly to voicemail and she’d left several messages. I turn the phone off when visiting with a grieving family and sometimes forget to turn it back on afterwards. Katherine had called the office and declared Jack was sick in the hospital.

I was expecting a severe flu or some injury or ailment. Sarah and Brian were at the cardiac ICU waiting room when I arrived. Sarah asked me to meet with the doctor and explain to her the full diagnosis for her father.

The doctor was the top cardiologist in the county. I had worked with him in the past in conjunction with the hospice, and the doctor pointed out that Jack would not require my service. The doctor explained to me in medical terms exactly what was wrong with Jack, and it was worse than Katherine had mentioned to me. The doctor, confused by the problem, wondered why the condition hadn’t been detected. The defect in his heart was obvious and easily repairable. Jack was a master at hiding his problems, and in two years of dating, I hadn’t noticed any signs of him having difficulty. Given the considerable damage to Jack’s heart, both the doctor and I were surprised that Jack lasted until the next morning.

Brian handled all the arrangements for Jack’s burial. Calling me the day after Jack passed away, Brian asked me about Jack’s girlfriends. He mentioned several old girlfriends had called and were quite upset at his passing. Brian requested my help in identifying old girlfriends and inviting them to a special memorial for Jack. Jack had discussed all his past girlfriends, including the indiscretions he had with them. There were only three women who’d been intimate with Jack since Sarah’s passing and they all remained good friends. I gave Brian the names of these women and their phone numbers since I became friends with them also. Brian wanted anyone who knew Jack closely invited to a private viewing.

Jack mentioned the three other women who’d occupied his time before me. Delving into details of what they meant to him and the blessing they had been in his life, he said he deeply regretted having sexual knowledge of these women, especially after finding Christ. He expounded that their relationships would have been just as meaningful without sleeping with them. His crass

human behavior caused him to sleep with them, and it was one of the many weaknesses of being a man. He prayed with me one time that the sexual weakness he had shown with these women had no ill effects on them. Jack feared for the difficulties in their lives from the sexual encounters, like they all had the dilemma of sleeping with Jack and then having a new boyfriend. There are the questions of what do you tell them and how do you explain your past indiscretions? With Bonnie and Marybeth, how do they explain to their children the sins in which Jack was an accomplice? I met the three women on separate occasions in the past and have to admit it was nice when Jack introduced me as his girlfriend. Meeting all three of them again at the different venues in Jack's honor, I asked if we could share the grieving process by meeting somewhere. To my astonishment, they were all agreeable. When I talked with Katherine at the burial site, she mentioned her disappointment in not knowing the women that were in her Dad's life. I told her about the social gathering of girlfriends planned that night at the restaurant next to the church in town where several community leaders had planned a memorial for Jack. Katherine seemed uncertain about coming, and Brian volunteered her to go if she didn't stay too late.

For several months after Jack's sudden demise, the one question that plagued me was, "Who was Jack's doctor?" Asking Katherine about it, I learned that her family doctor was the son of her doctor when she was growing up. I met with the retired doctor, who said he never saw Jack as a patient but as the husband or father of a patient. I received a call from the doctor about two weeks later, and he said they found Jack's file in the basement. The last recorded visit for Jack was 1957, when he came in with a broken nose from a fight in school. I checked the county hospital, and they had no record of Jack visiting the hospital. Using my position as a nurse, I called every doctor in and about our small town and no doctor had a record of Jack visiting. This explains why there was not an early detection of the condition so easily detected and corrected.

Jack was very special to me. When you were around him, it was hard not to focus on him because he made you feel like you were the only person in the room. I had given up on having a meaningful relationship before he came into my life. After my divorce, I had buried myself in work and church to avoid the disappointment of not having a man in my life. Jack showed me I could love again and got me to forgive myself for my divorce and terrible marriage. I was there when Jack found God and accepted being a widower for the first time since Sarah died. I was able to help him through the grieving process and move past his marriage to Sarah. In the end, I don't know if he helped me more than I helped him. I do know we both grew as humans from our brokenness into a more complete life. I want to thank Jack for being a steadfast friend who allowed me into his life and helped me conquer my fears of entering a new relationship.

(About the book)

I am a reporter for the local newspaper, and my editor, upon hearing of his death, asked me for a column on Jack Brown. Never having heard his name before, my search began with our newspaper, which uncovered twenty-two articles spanning nearly thirty years. These articles exposed Jack as successful business owner and philanthropist supporting many charities in his final years. The picture painted by these articles showed a charismatic and confident man.

Looking for a more personal profile of Jack, I attended several memorials in his honor. At the last event, with only the closest friends attending, I heard that Jack's loves were meeting at a diner later in the day. Six women gathered to mourn the loss of Jack Brown, and as they consoled each other, they found solace in revealing stories about the man they loved. When asked to describe Jack, they each gave an intimate memoir of their relationship with him.

Each chapter exposes the individual emotional experience of loving Jack in their own way. Although the six women shared part of his life, none acquired Jack's heart as his wife, Sarah, captured it. While illuminating his life, each of Jack's loves exposes her private life for the world to see. Their loving anecdotes about Jack convinced me to write a book exposing Jack's struggle with life.

(about the author)

Graduating high school in 1977, I began a career in restaurants and soon blossomed into management positions. Returning to college at age thirty, I received a BSBA in business administration and then managed the family business. I met my wife in July of 1993 and we married in March of 1994 with one child. While I remain active in the church and community, a good dad joke (bad pun) is always acceptable. All my stories originate from my nightly dreams, which are vivid and detailed with a plot. Upon my sharing several stories with friends, they suggested publishing them so the world might enjoy reading them.