

Chapter 1 THE DREAM

“I never wanted this house. I never wanted to be here. This is all your dream and I feel like I’m just along for the ride.”

My heart froze as these startling words rolled from my husband, Bob’s, lips. They would change my life in ways that I could never have imagined. I felt like I’d been hit in the stomach with a bat. I was speechless, very uncharacteristic for me. I stammered, “It didn’t occur to you to say something in the last four years?” He said he was confused.

I needed time to process what just happened. It was surreal. It was as though I’d just crossed over into a different dimension. Had the past three and a half years of my life been based on a lie? No, we’d made every decision together. What about his secret dream to own the top of a mountain and his happiness and excitement at the party before we moved? What the hell was going on?

The next morning, I told him that I really didn’t know if I could continue to live with him. How would I ever know if we were doing what he wanted? He offered no answers, nodded, and walked away.

Later, I asked him to explain what had changed, what he wanted. He didn’t have a plan. He seemed to know what he didn’t want. Finally he mentioned several things he wanted, none of which seemed to involve me. In the middle of our discussion, he went outside leaving me in utter amazement.

I took off my wedding band, placed it on his side of the dinette, and cried. He came back in and asked if I wanted to talk about “it.” Apparently “something” was upsetting me. Ya think? I didn’t know how anyone could be so disconnected from the reality of what was occurring. I felt like a complete and utter failure.

Over the next week, I suggested going to counseling to understand what was happening. After no response from Bob, I made an appointment with a local psychologist. He reluctantly agreed to go, but the day before the appointment he backed out. He declared, “There was no point,” since he’d always be the person who stole my dream house. I told him he hadn’t been listening to a thing I’d said. I was crying over a relationship that was dying not a house! Our official separation began that day when he moved from our camper. I will never be able to fully express the utter sense of disbelief, hurt, and failure that consumed me.

My dream-turned-nightmare began ten years earlier while vacationing in the North Carolina Mountains. Bob wanted to retire in the New York Mountains. To avoid longer winters, I asked if he could be happy in the Carolina Mountains. He thought so.

We returned to our farm in New Jersey and spoke with my parents, who owned the farm with us. They agreed to move, but it was too much for them at their ages. In deference to them, our plans were shelved for the time being.

As much as I loved our farm and equine hospital, I was experiencing too many aches and pains from the physical demands of the farm. I was anxious to let go of all of my responsibilities. When the move got delayed, it was hard to accept.

I realized I needed to let go of the expectation of moving. I kept telling myself that wherever we were supposed to be wouldn’t be available until we were ready. By surrendering to this belief, I moved out of my preoccupation with the future and went back to living in the NOW: the only place we truly live in. I had to accept that everything happens for a reason and have the faith that all was in perfection, which isn’t always easy to do.

Both my parents died of cancer in 2000. Their close proximity on the farm had made caregiving a thousand times easier. It was clear that postponing the move had been in everyone's best interest. *Everything does happen for a reason...*

After their passing, I began searching the Internet for property in the Carolina Mountains. We wanted land, so we could build our dream retirement home. My search began as a diversion from all my grief and sadness. I had been blessed with terrific parents, and coping with their absence was tremendously difficult.

We went to North Carolina with a list of prospective properties. The realtor showed us photos of a property that had just come on the market a week earlier. Well, the little light bulb in my head flickered. Was this my special spot that wouldn't be available until we were ready?

I knew a short time after walking onto the land that my soul was home. Bob said he felt the same way. We spent the rest of our week hiking and enjoying the area that was to be our new home. The property included the top of the mountain and 40 percent of it was bordered by State Game Land; simply perfect. Bob shared with me a secret dream he had to own a mountaintop. (Not that we ever own anything in Nature.) "Wow, he does love it as much as I do," I thought.

Feeling as though my soul had found its home was something I'd never experienced before, although I've lived in several beautiful places. In my 50s, I was moving into a home of my own choosing for the very first time.

Over the next three years, we prepared the land for our new home. Although I still had all of the responsibilities of running the farm, hospital, and veterinary office, I spent untold hours getting educated about all aspects of house building. To my surprise, I felt such joy when I was working on the house and property.

As the move got closer, I had to focus on the downside of relocating – like leaving the farm that I'd loved and worked for the past 27 years. It was a very special spot that held the graves of a number of my cherished animals, not to mention the ashes of my parents. It was the place where I'd learned so many lessons.

Having a farm is a lifestyle choice you make, a 24/7 job. My lifestyle centered on Bob, the only man I've ever loved. I gave up my pharmacy career to concentrate on what I truly loved: Bob, our farm/hospital, and the animals. We were blessed to truly love what we did everyday. The poet, Rumi, wrote, "Let what you do, be what you love:" very wise words that offer an enjoyable life, if you follow them. We had done just that.

The farm allowed me to experience the thrill of birth. Each time a mare foals, it's as miraculous as the first time. The farm allowed me the privilege of assisting individuals at their time of transition back to spirit too. Nature is always about balance. Hopefully, you enjoy the highs, and remember what the lows have come to teach you.

The farm, my animals, and some of our patients taught me the most powerful lessons. They uncovered my animal communication and healing abilities. The farm facilitated my opening to my soul's true purpose. Without my husband's practice and the farm, I might never have discovered my true calling. Now, I was making a choice to let go of my home for 27 rewarding years, which had taught me my purpose for this lifetime.

For 53 years I had lived within an hour of where I was born in New Jersey. I am blessed with so many wonderful, close friends. My move would take me 600 miles away from everything I was familiar with. I knew I'd be leaving everyone, but it didn't really hit home until the day arrived.

Our town bought the farm to reincorporate it into township acreage that surrounded it. We felt the farm deserved to be protected and not developed. The farm had given us a great life, so in return, we sold it for preservation. The closing was in late December 2003, with an agreement for us to remain until the following May 1st, our 27th anniversary.

We made many trips to the mountain moving everything we could pack onto or into our trailers. We moved *everything*. It was exciting, but extremely stressful. We loaded the trailers in between veterinary, farm, and office work, drove down, unloaded everything, and drove back the next day. It seemed never-ending.

We moved old tractors, a new tractor, a sailboat, thousands of tools, veterinary equipment, an operating table, not to mention all of the treasures from our home. I moved all of our art and fragile things in my car and horse trailer. Many were my mother's and contained memories of her and my childhood.

It finally came time to move the horses. I had two brothers remaining, Randy and Stormy, who were the last of a line I'd begun in the early '80s. They were both very big with very little experience trailering. I hired a friend from North Carolina – who would keep them for me initially – to ship them in her large trailer. We followed with a trailer of stuff for her farm. The trip took 12 hours.

The horses arrived in great shape, but I didn't. I was responsible for their safety and well-being, and until they got into their new stalls, I'd been on edge. The next morning they both looked wonderful, but I was ill-prepared for the trip back. I had been so focused on getting the horses to their new home safely, I hadn't thought about the fact that I was leaving them so far away. In 40 years, my horses had never been more than an hour away. For the last 27 years, they had lived with me. I hadn't considered that my relationship with my horses would be altered in ways I didn't yet comprehend until it happened.

Bob and I argued about the best way to drive back. He suggested a route that I knew was way out of the way. When I expressed this, he snapped at me. Maybe he was emotional about leaving the horses as well. I was having enough trouble leaving the horses; I didn't need his attitude. I didn't utter another word.

Separation anxiety struck, and it struck hard as I went in and out of tears. It was killing me to walk away from several things in their stalls that looked potentially harmful without correcting them. My emotions overwhelmed me for the rest of the day.

I couldn't let go of worrying about my horses. I really couldn't let go of them. What did I expect? Of course, I had to *let go*. I'd never considered how moving would change my relationship with my horses, so I was grieving an unforeseen loss.

Bob took the route he wanted, which added a couple of extra hours to the trip, and he knew it. He was angry with himself, but directed it towards me. All of a sudden, he pulled over. He had run out of gas. I didn't say a thing. The tension in the truck was unbearable. We had to be towed in after a part broke while trying to start the diesel with too little gas.

After the repair was completed, Bob needed to fill up with gas. I thought he turned the wrong way, but didn't say a word. I'd learned my lesson hours earlier. When he realized what he'd done, he turned around and still missed the road.

I mentioned that I'd been afraid to open my mouth. He was glad I was. "It was about time!" I was stunned, deeply hurt, and bewildered. What was going on? Who was this person? How dare he speak to me like that? Doesn't he know the pain and hurt I'm feeling? Doesn't he care? I kept my mouth shut, but came so close to saying we better rethink our plans. I decided to give him the benefit of the doubt. After all, this was the person I loved and who loved me, or was it? I let it go.

I never said another word that day or the following. I spent the time bouncing back and forth between the loss I was feeling over the horses, and the utter confusion about what was going on with my husband. I truly didn't understand where all of this anger was coming from. What had I done? He certainly didn't want to talk about anything.

We got back to the farm and went back to business as usual. Nothing more was said about the trip. Later, I would realize this was probably the biggest mistake of my life. My spirit was weary for the first time ever.

A few weeks later, we held an auction. My parents left 80-plus years worth of things, beautiful things, but things I couldn't use in a mountain house. Again, I was totally unprepared. I thought people would value my folks' amazing furniture, crystal, dishes, glassware, and linens, but instead they stole them. I was appalled as I watched all of the familiar things of my childhood be bid on by strangers. It was the hardest day of my life. I felt my parents, whose ashes were spread around trees not far from where this whole fiasco was occurring, were being disrespected.

There were some happy moments when friends would tell me about something they'd bought to remember us by. This was the only thing that saved the day for me, plus the fact that most everything was gone. I was utterly exhausted by day's end.

One powerful lesson was that things are just things. I'd always heard the cliché: one man's trash is another man's treasure. Well, in this instance, it was the exact opposite. My family's treasures had been treated like trash, or at least that was how I felt.

I learned the real value lies in the memories stored in the treasures. In losing my parents, I had learned that all you really have are your memories, so you better make good ones. This was definitely not a good one. It took a long time to let go of the pain of that day.

After three years of planning and preparation, it was time. I walked around the farm, in tears, making a video and saying thanks and goodbye to everything that was so dear to me. My heart was ready to move. I knew I couldn't keep up the pace I had for the past 40 years of caring for horses.

I kept reminding myself, while shedding tears of gratitude, that "to everything there is a season and a time to every purpose...." My time in this special place was over. I was moving on to the next chapter in my life; whatever that was to be. I let go of the place I had identified with for more than half of my life. I said goodbye and it hurt, but my heart knew it was right for me.

I've returned to my friends and the farm numerous times since moving. I harbor only fond memories of life on Fair Chance Farm, which proves my choice was the *right* one. The farm was my slice of heaven; my life of peace and serenity amidst hard work. It holds the memories of joys and sorrows, births and deaths, but then, aren't these what life is about? I was the farm, but now I had to let go completely. My soul was ready to move on.

Upon arriving at our new mountain location, I felt the joy of what the future held for us. I didn't really know exactly what that was, but I knew I was where I was meant to be. My mission was building our home for the rest of our lives.

Bob returned to New Jersey the day after we arrived, which confused and upset me. He'd made dental and medical appointments for the week after our move. He was planning to speak with people from the Christian Veterinary Mission, which was meeting in New Jersey. He was planning mission work with them. My eyes got huge and I said, "But we're building a house!" He assured me that his mission work was in the future. I just shook my head and walked away. He drove out, as the moving truck arrived, leaving me the frustrating job of setting up our new base alone.

I called Bob with some problem and heard a lot of background noise. I asked where he was. He said at lunch. Where? He was at the Christian Veterinary Mission meeting. In a very angry tone I said, "*You're at a meeting?*" I never said another thing after that and never initiated another call. Obviously, this meeting was more important than building our home. The thought of that was too painful, so I ignored it. I felt lied to by the person I trusted most in this life. I didn't have time to deal with this, so I let it go. I was building a house...

I have two close friends with the same name, but spelled differently. Michelle, dubbed little Michelle, introduced me to Michele, dubbed Master Michele, because she's a Master Gardener. Since they will be mentioned a lot in my writing, I wanted to clarify this.

I'd spoken with Master Michele before my discovery about the meeting. I thought Bob was staying with her, but she hadn't heard from him. I was surprised and wondered where he was staying. Since this was Bob, who I trusted implicitly, I figured he must have gotten a motel room in town. Well, he did, just not in our town.

Bob called a couple of times. I answered his questions without engaging in any conversation. I was hurt and confused. He returned and I said nothing about his trip. My friends were crazed that I would let this go. I assured them that I wouldn't. I wanted it to be a constructive discussion, which would take proper timing.

A couple of weeks later, while out to breakfast, it felt like the proper time. I began calmly, but it escalated into a very emotional scene. I accused him of lying. He said he didn't lie. I said he lied by omission. Eventually, I walked out of the restaurant in tears. The hurt was intense. My lover, best friend, and life partner had deceived me. My emotions were raw, so no matter when I'd have chosen to talk about this, the result would have been the same.

The house parts were delivered the day after Bob's return. Because of the access to the house site, we had to unload everything onto our trailers to move them up. It never occurred to me how much material is involved in building a house. I felt a great sense of accomplishment when everything arrived safely. We had hired a field expert, whose job was putting together Deltec houses, which are round. He made the process flow perfectly.

Over the next two weeks, our expert guided the group of contractors in erecting our home. Bob's youngest son, a house framer who lived in Florida, came to help build for the first month. I knew this was time my husband would cherish. To be able to build a home with his son was something not a lot of men could experience.

Watching something you've put so much of yourself into begin to take shape is an amazingly satisfying experience. I had never done anything quite like it before. It wasn't without its frustrations, but they always seemed to be followed quickly by solutions. What was becoming stressful was the skyrocketing cost involved. I'd worry about how much we were spending, and then feel the joy of seeing our dream come to life. My mind led me down the path of stress, worry, and fear. My heart told me this was the right thing to do.

A few weeks into construction, Bob informed me that he was flying to New Mexico. He had plans to donate his operating room table to a Native American group that trained veterinary technicians. This gift had been arranged through the Christian Veterinary Mission several years earlier. I was stunned that he would consider a trip while we were building our home. I started to express my feelings about the timing of the trip as he handed me his flight schedule. I was speechless. A man, who'd hardly made a flight reservation in almost 30 years, already had his. Obviously, my input was of no importance to him.

While Bob was gone, one of our cats was missing. Lucky was always around and came when called. I used my telepathic communication skills to ask him to show himself. The next morning, he was lying in the steel building. I simply said "thank you" and went on my way. A little while later, I found him lying in the rain by the camper. I froze. He was limp. I felt so guilty that I hadn't paid more attention to him earlier. I was 600 miles away from the small animal vet that I had confidence in; one of those dear friends I'd left behind.

I rushed Lucky to the vet's office. He was admitted to their hospital and died the next day. Poison was the diagnosis. The vet guessed antifreeze. I'd worried about my animals confronting the wild ones on the mountain, but it was an inorganic predator that took Lucky. We did have the construction crew's cars and trucks around. I watched my remaining three cats and two dogs very closely.

After my parents lost their last dog, Lucky had become my mother's companion and comforted her following my father's death. After my mother's passing, I found him numerous times

sitting under the tree we planted for her on top of her ashes. I was in awe of this. He had been such a support to her, and now he was gone. I was having a hard time letting go of him. I had no one to share my grief with.

None of my other animals got into whatever Lucky had. Over time, I realized that he was ready to go. The person he had come to help in this life didn't need his love anymore. His job was done and done well. When Bob got back, we tried to bury him. Our rocky mountain wouldn't let us dig a grave. Bob was determined and got his tractor stuck. Later, I realized that he really wasn't doing it for Lucky or me. He was doing it to assuage the guilt he felt about the lie he was living; the lie that I was still in the dark about. Lucky didn't want to be on the mountain, which I really didn't understand at the time, but would in the not too distant future.

After Bob returned, I headed to see my horses that lived 125 miles away. He could deal with the responsibilities of house construction for a change. My horses had lived outside my door for the past 27 years, so this scenario was a tremendous challenge for me. As I got in my car, Bob said he was depressed about how much the house was costing. I told him that we were too deep into it now to stop. If we had to put it on the market later, so be it. The value was there. It would have been a perfect opportunity to get into a discussion about what was going on with him, but I needed to see my horses.

So, I drove two hours to the barn thinking of nothing but his comment. I left a message the next day saying we needed to talk. This was just a house. What was more important was our relationship. When I got back, my husband was genuinely pleased to see me. I hadn't felt that kind of energy from him in years, which made his astonishing words, the next evening, even more inconceivable. *"I never wanted this house. I never wanted to be here. This is all your dream and I feel like I'm just along for the ride."*

After Bob's "confession," I was an emotional, crying wreck one minute, and then the next someone focused on getting the house finished enough to be protected from the weather. My fantastic dream had now turned into my worst nightmare. The depth of that nightmare I wouldn't really know for some time to come.

I just couldn't understand why he let us start the house, and neither could anyone else. We were a mere six weeks into construction. I was in a place I had never been to before in my life, and I was there alone. As far as I was concerned, my best friend and lifelong companion had just died. He looked and sounded like Bob, but he wasn't him.

I was 600 miles from my home, my friends, and my support. I was devastated and *very* afraid. I was exhausted – physically, mentally, emotionally and especially, spiritually. I felt isolated, abandoned, and betrayed. My life was out of control. I was one sad and confused soul. I felt so alone. I wanted to simply stay in bed and cry, but I couldn't. I had animals that needed me and business to deal with.

Several days later, I was getting ready to meet with realtors about listing my dream. It was hard enough to think about that concept, but to actually do it was unbearably painful. I wanted to give the listing to the realtor that we had bought the land through, but Bob felt we should interview several agencies. I would leave in the middle of the meetings, because I was so overcome with emotions. I couldn't stand to hear all of the raves about the house design and the views. One realtor kept calling it a "World Class Home." Just before running out in tears I said, "It's just a house. It's not a home."

We chose the realtor I wanted from the start making my torture completely unnecessary. I will *never* forget signing the listing agreement. The realtor brought another new realtor along to learn the process. We reviewed marketing strategy, pricing, whatever. I felt like I was in the other dimension now. My business mind allowed me to get the paperwork done without any outbursts.

As I described the best way to market the property, my tears fell. To me, the property was about the views and the energy on the mountain. You had to be on it to *feel* it. When I tried to talk about the view, I couldn't get the words out. Reality struck hard. The poor young realtor was fighting her own tears, and she didn't even know me.

Bob seemed devoid of emotion and oblivious to my agony. Never once during any of my outbursts of raw emotion did he try to comfort me. To this day, I think that was the hardest thing for me to accept. He didn't care about me. Where had my husband gone? What had I ever done to deserve this treatment?

After the realtors left, Bob asked if I wanted to go out for lunch. I looked at him in disbelief. We ate lunch hardly speaking a word. So, what was that about? One minute we were dissolving our life together, then we're not, but we are. I just couldn't keep up with it all. It was an emotional roller coaster, and I was falling off.

After lunch, Bob call his father. Later, I called my father-in-law, Vince. He was really confused and concerned. I explained what was happening, my shock, and utter confusion. I was trying to be sensitive, since I was speaking about his stepson. I told him that I feared we were heading to divorce, but I wasn't sure yet. He fell silent. I knew I had just stunned him with that fact.

Bob had told him the house had gotten too expensive, so we just listed it and would build a smaller house on the property. Hello, what just happened; slipped into that other dimension did we? I assured Vince that we were not building another house. Talk about denial and deception.

Several days later, I called and told Vince my worst fears had become reality. We were separated and filing for divorce. I could feel his sadness and disappointment. Vince was quick to tell me that I would *always* be his daughter-in-law, no matter what. His words affected me deeply. I missed my own father terribly, especially now. My father-in-law has filled that void for me as well as anyone might. My father had really big shoes to fill. I couldn't have withstood another loss, and I wasn't going to have to. I was so pleased and greatly relieved.

So there it was: my marriage was over. I thought I'd been a good wife, and we'd lived a wonderful life together. I assumed our relationship was forever. The mountain, which was my spiritual home and where I expected to die, was up for sale. The magnificent house would never be my home. My best friend had disappeared. My future was uncertain. My identity was gone. I was afraid, devastated, and alone. Who was I? Where would I go? What would happen to me? Oh, my God, I don't have anywhere to live! I can't stay in a camper on the side of a mountain in winter. What a shocking realization to wake up to one morning. I was lost.

I handled the construction issues and any office chores in my usual, efficient way. Then, I'd transform into an emotional, blubbering idiot in the camper. My dogs didn't understand what was happening. They were so worried about me. I knew from my animal communication practice the damage that could be done to the animal members of a family undergoing the stresses of divorce. I explained to everyone that they didn't have to take on my negative energy. I was capable of dealing with it myself. My animals knew better than I what a joke that was. I needed them to stay healthy.

Without them, I might not be writing this. There were times when it seemed easier to simply leave this life and try again at another time. What always loomed before me was my responsibility to my animal friends. Who would take care of them? They became my salvation. As I look back, I was more concerned about my animals than myself; an unhealthy pattern of mine. This was a lesson I was trying to teach myself, although my trauma wasn't allowing me to see it.

The day after "those" words were uttered, I was on the phone to my dearest friends. I needed help, support, and sympathy/empathy. I needed to hear that I wasn't losing my mind. I needed to talk to someone I could trust. I needed to be loved. I got all of that, and so much more. I am blessed with many wonderful friends. I called on them all, and they responded regardless of the difficulties of their own lives. Being so far from everyone I knew and loved was devastating. I was so

needy, which was something I'd never felt before. I was usually the one trying to be there for the other person. Now, I was experiencing the opposite role.

I felt so much better after my conversations, but soon after I felt alone, isolated, and abandoned again. How could that be? I was still on my mountain that had been so healing, so special, and so powerful. How had I gotten into this mess? I never saw it coming. I'd lost all confidence in myself. Until this happened, I felt I was pretty in tune to what was happening in my life. I was normally very intuitive. This shook me to the core.

I split time between fear and grief. Fear of the future, fear of the unknown, fear of the Now – fear, fear, fear. Where would I go? What would I do? How will I survive? Why did this happen? Grief over the loss of my husband and best friend, the person I most trusted, took control of me. I grieved the loss of the life we had planned together. It was overpowering, debilitating, and all consuming. My heart was broken. It felt like stone.

Bob told the folks we'd bought the land from that it was for sale. I assumed he'd told them the truth. Bad assumption, I found out later. It took a month until I could get through a discussion without getting emotional. I didn't want to appear uncaring or rude, so I stopped by to apologize to Fred and Eunice. I felt so guilty.

I rambled on about my disbelief over our separation and eventual divorce. They just looked at me stunned. Fred got very quiet and went outside to putter, while I continued to talk to Eunice. She shared her disbelief about my news. Apparently, my husband told them the same thing he had told his father. I couldn't believe it.

Fred died later that fall. I felt so bad for Eunice, since I knew how painful it was to lose a husband. We became better friends simply because we shared a common tragedy. After Fred's death, Eunice told me Fred went outside that day because of his shock over our pending divorce. He was upset and didn't want me to see it. Eunice and I continue to visit when I check on the property. I always plan for a quick hello, but I never leave before an hour.

My business mind sent me to the bookstore for resources on divorce. I would study it just like anything else I'd done in my life. I came back with a book, *The Unofficial Guide to Divorce*, by Sharon Naylor. It was set up like a tour guide. I highly recommend it. It satisfied my mental needs. Divorce was my new project.

The other book fed my spiritual side. It was *Spiritual Divorce* by Debbie Ford. It was just what the soul doctor ordered. Debbie shares her own experience with divorce and the possibilities for the life that follows. It was inspiring and hopeful. Normally, I'm a voracious reader. After I finished these two books, I was unable to read for nine months.

Reading was something I always loved, but I simply couldn't concentrate. I couldn't stop my conscious mind from creating negative images of my future, or painful memories of my past married life and expectations never to be realized. I was a prisoner of my thoughts. My ego wouldn't allow me to live in the present. I seemed to have no control over the negative thoughts in my mind. Distraction was my solution. TV was the answer to my incessant, destructive thoughts. As luck would have it, the Olympics were on that summer. Whatever it takes to get you through, just do it.

I remember watching the drama of the death of President Ronald Reagan. I spent the entire time crying and utterly distraught. I was unable to stop watching coverage. Why was I so upset over the loss of this man? I was sad when John Kennedy was killed, but I didn't fall apart. Now, I was falling apart. I was grieving lost love, not of the Reagans', but my own.

Bob and I had been so in love in the beginning. Our love was everything a girl hopes for. Time and life stole it from us, and we let it. Why? I couldn't answer that. I marveled at the Reagans' accomplishment, and Nancy's strength and self-control. I felt a deep sense of loss, which overwhelmed me, but I kept watching. When she finally gave in to her emotions and laid her head

down on his casket, I became despondent. Tears poured from me. I finally surrendered to my deep sense of lost love.

Desperation was an unfamiliar emotion for me, and I didn't like it. It's not a place you want to make major decisions from. All I heard from everyone was, "Don't make any big decisions." In an ideal world that might work, but I was a long way from the ideal. I wasn't given a choice. I had to find a house. As easy as it was to find the mountain property, it was proving to be the exact opposite to find another place.

Because of the animals, I knew I couldn't rent, which would have been the ideal solution. How could I be expected to do this all over again? No one cares, so "Just do it" like the ad says. My time was divided between ending an old life and beginning a new one. I didn't want a new one. Who decided I needed a new one? It certainly wasn't me. I was trying to manage the chaos that arose from one person's decision to change his mind.

To this day, I'm still not sure which is harder; ending or beginning. I will never forget splitting our assets and liabilities for the property settlement. My business mind was making things equitable, while my emotional/spiritual side was struggling with ending a 29-year relationship. Things on paper – 29 years of a life shared with someone – was so much more than *things*. Yet, there it was a list on a page. After it was completed, I went into the camper and just cried. I still couldn't believe this was happening. Our 29-year relationship distilled down to stuff on a page.

I seemed to be losing everything, or at least many of the things, that mattered to me. Why? The time I spent in the camper seemed like ten times as long as it was. I was used to being busy. I never had enough time in the day to get it all done. Now, I had nothing but time, and I hated it. I was so unhappy, which was another powerful and unfamiliar emotion. I was lost and despondent.

Thanks to my ego, I spent time either grieving over my past or fearing for my future. I was a human *doer*, not a human *being*. I couldn't live like this. I kept questioning everything I had done. What could I have done better or differently? Was I a bad person? I was honest, and did the best I could. I treated others well. There was a nonstop dialog in my head, as I questioned everything about me. Who was I? I certainly wasn't the vet's wife anymore. I played that role for 27 years. It was my identity and it changed in a heartbeat, but not by my choice.

I felt like a failure and struggled every waking minute with the unwanted changes happening all around me. My turmoil was the result of another's choice to live his life without me. My confidence and self-esteem plummeted. If it weren't for my friends, I would have fallen into an even deeper depression. The grief over my losses was overwhelming. I had fallen into a darkness of spirit, which I nicknamed the Abyss. It was frightening and lonely in the *Abyss*.