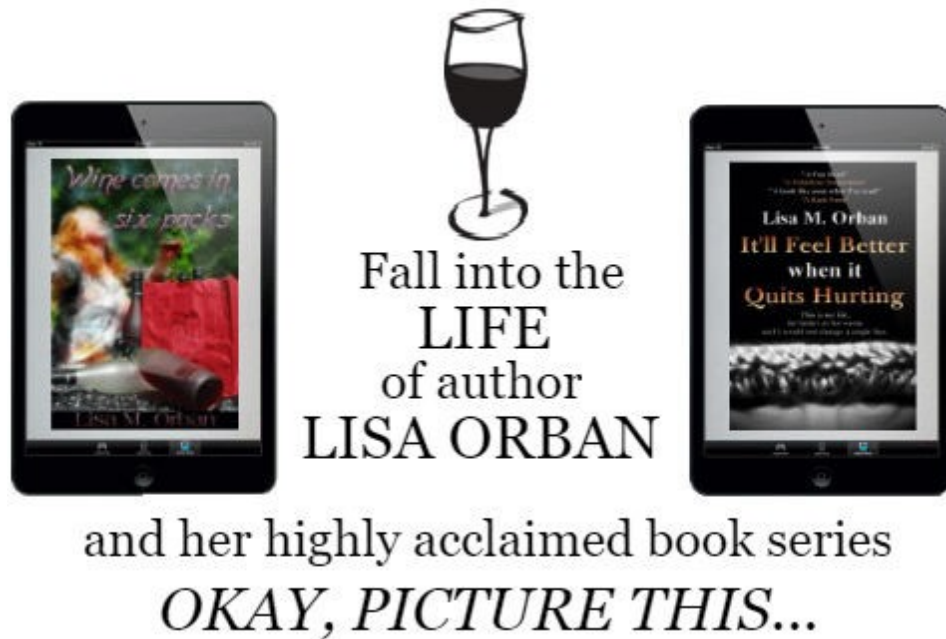


Reviewers



A rare gem

I laughed, I cried and most of all, I FELT. Sorrow, joy and amusement in equal measure... Reading like a series of short stories with a lifetime arc, this is a book that was hard to put down and one I highly recommend. This is, above all, an honest book that doesn't spare the author or the reader. This is a book like none other I've read.

Sandy Toes

Amazon Top 1000 Reviewer

A Fabulous Inspiration

The author refers to this book as a roller coaster of emotion, and she couldn't be more accurate. This book made me laugh, cry, and feel disappointed, sad, angry, happy... a whole range of emotions!

Teresa Kandar

Author of, Heartbreak and Happiness

Creating Light

An excellent, powerful read. Lisa's writing is truly alive. Reading this book is like spending time looking through a scrapbook or photo album, and it is its episodic approach is exactly the proper way to share this story. At turns disturbing and hilarious, the book's larger message is this: It's possible to courageously face the darkness in life, and not just find the light, but create it.

Tracy Knight

author of, The Astonished Eye

‘Like mist slipping through my fingers, I was once again losing myself in someone else's life.’

Illinois born Lisa Orban has walked, run, been shoved through a wild beginning life and she is here to share that life with us. Not only does she write well (as though we were sitting next to her chatting) but she opens windows onto foster care, child abuse, domestic violence, teenagers’ angst at what exactly is an ‘adult’ and yet mixes all of this grim reality into a memoir that is profoundly involving and moving - and entertaining and full of some zingers that will have you howling.

This is not a book that is tidy to review: this is a book to experience, especially if the reader has no personal connection with the roughshod traipse through childhood and young adulthood Lisa has endured – and now manages to make us laugh with her (as well as try to overcome the desire to just give her a huge hug).

Grady Harp

HALL OF FAME TOP 100 REVIEWER & VINE VOICE

**An oddly feel-good, quirky, hilarious memoir about friendship
and the triumph of the human spirit**

“It’ll Feel Better when it Quits Hurting”, which is good to know because you will be hurting. It’s not just the terrible tragedies and senseless injustices; you’ll also be hurting from laughing so hard, and then from the crazy antics, the keen wit, and the general hilarity of a teenaged rebel, who carries some of that with her into adulthood. Knowing the book is mostly autobiographical, I do feel a little guilty for laughing so much, but I think Lisa would want me

to.

While parts of the book are certainly dark and troubling, it's never depressing. "It'll Feel Better when it Quits Hurting" is oddly a feel-good, quirky, hilarious memoir about friendship and the triumph of the human spirit.

Well written and very well done!

Cristel Orrand

Author of "Khayal" and "The Amalgamist"

It'll Feel Better When It Quits Hurting is undoubtedly in the running towards becoming one of my favorite books of 2017

This book tells us the author's life story.

It is a story of resilience, of resurrection, of rising from one's own ashes, as well as a story of survival. But most significantly, it is a fun, addictive narrative.

This is Lisa Orban's unique talent: she talks about her most miserable, heart-breaking memories, and still manages to put a smile on your face.

From the very first chapters I felt connected to Lisa as a "character",

I cared for her and felt the incessant need to find out what happened next to her, always wishing life gave her a break, but secretly knowing it would not be the case. Throughout the whole thing, I laughed, I cringed, and even felt a lump in my throat.

I can only think of thanking Lisa for putting this together. I found myself constantly checking how far I was into the book, as I did not want it to end. Now I cannot wait to get my hands on her next one.

Marisa Ascota

Fell in Love with a Book Blog

Life Lessons

This isn't a story. It is the author's life. It is probably many people's lives. Parts of it were my life. The author has learned to use humor as much as she can and acceptance mixed with forgiveness for things that she can't change.

It is not a hard book to read but, at the same time, it isn't easy. Throughout though you will be cheering Lisa on. She is a very likable person, (in the book. I don't know her personally.). She

writes honestly, even if she doesn't look the best in every situation.

I would recommend this book though I would suggest you make a few days for it. It is in my opinion a book you will read, reflect, read, reflect with. Some parts may be hard, depending on your own experiences with life. In the end though, it is worth it. Grab some coffee and settle in. I'm looking forward to her next book.

F. Christina

Alaskan Book Cafe

Dedications

To my Dad,
And to the Xanax he took
that allowed us to have a relationship
that wasn't possible when I was growing up.
I'm glad we got to know each other.

And to
David Flentjie
You were my first love,
my co-conspirator in mischief,
& you changed the course of my life more than once.
I will miss you forever & always dear friend.

A special thanks to Alexander Mann who is responsible for all of the artwork contained within
this book.

AND

To Squirrel Boy a.k.a. Cory Grigsby, without his ADHD style of attention to detail while
reading endless rough drafts, and his ability to make me laugh, even when I wanted to cry,
this book would not have been possible.

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Quincy, IL 62301

Connections



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Dear Reader,

For those of you that have read my first book, *It'll Feel Better when it Quits Hurting*, hello again dear friends. For my new Readers, welcome and I hope you enjoy it. Please be assured, even though this is the second book in the series, each book has been written so that it can be read independently. I will not leave you wandering through these pages wondering what is going on. As I shared in my first book, while writing, it has been my intention to bring you the story of my life, not as someone looking back, but from my singular point of view, as it was happening. I tried very hard not to foreshadow upcoming events, nor did I want to interject the present into the past. I wanted you, dear reader, to experience my life as I did, unknowing of the future, learning as I went, growing and maturing in each story. I am not always the hero of my narrative, I did not always make sound judgment calls, and I have made some truly astounding mistakes. But life is like that for everyone, and it would not be an honest telling if I did not share the dark moments along with the light.

But, I want you to know, dear reader, for all the dark that creeps in, mostly, what my books are about is laughing. At the absurdity that is life, feeling joy in the simple act of being, accepting that even when life isn't perfect, it can be wonderful. This is simply, my life as I have lived it, and I hope that along the way you will laugh with me, maybe roll your eyes, groan and shake your head, eager to turn the next page to see where the train wreck ends. And, when you reach the end and close the book, you pause for just a moment and think, "Damn, that was a helluva ride!", and that in that brief moment, you can imagine me sitting next to you, with a grin on my face, nodding in agreement.

For the last two years I have worked on this book, putting my heart, soul, and every spare moment of time I have able to carve out of my life into creating it. As an Indie author, I do not have the full backing of a professional editorial staff, but that does not mean I have not tried with all due diligence to bring you a book free of errors. If there are any editing errors still lurking within these pages, I am truly sorry. English is an unwieldy language, even for native speakers, only made worse by my dyslexia, and my fast & loose use of the language at the best of times. To paraphrase James Davis Nicoll, "*English doesn't borrow from other languages. English follows other languages down dark alleys, knocks them over, and rummages through their pockets for loose grammar.*" Please know, it was not for lack of care that any mistakes remain in the book, and that you will forgive me for them if you find any.

I would like to thank every person who has willingly read my first drafts. Alex for his

wonderful illustrations. Cory for helping me laugh, even when I wanted to cry. To Millie, who came to my rescue and helped me write the blurb and saved me from banging my head against the wall. To my family, who have been supportive of my words, even though at times my books are not entirely kind or flattering, and accepted my words for what they were, an honest account of my life that was never meant to be intentionally hurtful. And, a special thanks to every person that has continued to encourage me to write, eagerly waiting for the next installment. But most of all, I would like to thank you, dear Reader, for taking a chance on an Indie author. I know that you have chosen to spend your hard-earned money, and precious time with me, and it is sincerely appreciated.

Before I end this and we continue to the actual stories, I thought I would share with you how the cover image came to be. If you're not interested, you can skip the rest of this, otherwise, please enjoy this short funny.

Deciding to release a sneak peek in July 2016, I was suddenly in desperate need a book cover. Always the problem solver, I ran to my local liquor store, purchased six bottles of wine (I wonder if I can take those off as a business expense, hmmm...) and returned home. Conscripting Cory, he took one for the team and helped me drink half of those bottles (kicking & screaming on the inside the whole time I'm sure) while wandering around the yard with my camera looking for the best place to take the photos.

While drinking and wandering, my teenaged daughter unknowingly walked into being drafted to help me take the photos the following morning when my yard would be full of bright sunlight (a terrible oversight on my part while nursing a slight wine hangover the next morning).

At first reluctant to help, she quickly changed her mind and jumped on board once I told her how much professional photos would cost me. (Never underestimate the power of teenaged self-interest when it comes to money) She agreed not only to help, but even to willingly get up before her normal the crack of noon on the weekends.

At 10 o'clock on a bright and sunny Sunday morning (hangover notwithstanding), I set up the tripod, poured a glass of wine and for the next hour, laughed and drank, as my daughter made fun of me while taking over 200 photos. From those 200 plus photos we narrowed it down to 20, and then down to a final three that I played with on my computer until I finally settled on the cover you see now.

So, yes, that's really me, actually drinking wine, in my own backyard at 10 o'clock on a Sunday morning while my daughter made fun of me. I suppose I could have used props, gathered up empty bottles from friends, and used grape juice instead, but where would be the fun in that?

And now, without further ado...

Wine Comes in Six-Packs



Foreword

Michael Creed



About two months ago Lisa dropped me an email, “Hey! My second book is about done can you give it a read and let me know what you think? Oh, and if you’d like, you can write me a forward since many of these stories feature you”. Well, being the good friend that I am, I jumped right in and opened my big mouth and said, “YES!! I can do that for you Lisa. Give me a couple weeks and I’ll send you something.” After all, just how hard can it be to jot down a couple paragraphs?

Two months later...

I’m here to tell you that was probably one of the dumbest things that I have agreed to do for Lisa, and I have done a **lot** of dumb stuff in the last almost 30 years for her. Think about your closest friend that you have had the longest, and ask yourself to sum that all up, in just a few short paragraphs.

Ha, ha, ha sucker!! Good Luck!!

Okay, I’m done whining, so onward we go.

BATSHIT CRAZY!! Ever had to describe someone or thing in just one word?? Well, there you go. Well, okay, maybe I should be a good friend and explain that just a little. Hey, don’t think less of me, I am, after all, the guy she described as, and I quote “He’s a helluva nice guy when he’s not beating his wife and kids,” unquote. And just for the record **NO** I have never beaten my wife nor my kids. (**There's more to the quote, and you can find it later in the book, and honest! it was funny! - Lisa*)

Simply put, Lisa is my friend, my best friend, she has been my accomplice, my wingman, and my jailor, judge, jury, and even at times my executioner.

Lisa has been the yin to my yang, and we have helped each other through more bad times than most people have had the misfortune to have to endure.

Lisa has earned my respect so many times over the years that I simply stopped counting, and then it stopped mattering.

These stories are mostly true, I know, I was there, one way or the other, since she was 20-years-old.

We have helped each other sweep up the pieces of our shattered lives, and helped the other glue those pieces back together. Sometimes they fit well, and sometimes not so well. We have been ***that friend***, the one you ask when you want the truth, I mean the real truth, and I'm here to tell you, that that's worth more than its weight in gold.

I, for one, would not know how to go forward Lisa without your good advice, humor, and kindness in my life, and yes, sometimes even those, "are you f**ing mental?" moments.

To the readers, enjoy these stories and know that there is not a moral to be had anywhere, laugh at the funny stuff, cry at the sad stuff, and always remember that these things really happened to someone. And a last piece of advice, look around and try to find your Lisa, the one that asks "Do I need to bring bail money or do you have it covered?" And truly mean it. The one, that no matter what, has your back.

Lisa, you have been many things to me over the years my mentor, my worst enemy, my lover, the mother of my child, and many, many other things, but you will always be my best friend, and my hero, for never giving up on me, and striving towards your dreams.

Mike C.

Your Handy Guide to Finding the Stories

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Prologue



***You can be
right,

or you can be in a
relationship,

and by god...
I'm gonna be right.***

Prologue 1



I want to be the Madame of a House of Ill-Repute



When I was twelve my English teacher gave us an assignment to write about what we wanted to be when we grew up, as I'm sure many of you were given the same assignment. But of all the papers I wrote as a child, this is the one that stands out in my memory. I'm an adult now and a mother of five, I no longer have the paper I wrote from that far away time, but I do remember the title, and that for one perfect moment in my life I knew exactly what I wanted to be.

I didn't actually know per se what a Madame was, or what it meant to live that kind of life, but I did know that it involved pretty dresses, expensive houses and gentleman callers. Not that I knew what a gentleman caller was either, other than someone who brought flowers and money. Since most of my knowledge of what a Madame was came from the endless Spaghetti Westerns my father watched on TV, it's easy to see how I may have gotten a somewhat skewed view of what it really meant. It was the most glamorous career I could think of at the age of twelve when the world felt awkward and so did I. Boys were mean, we were no longer young enough for the playground, but not old enough to date, and we all lived in that horrible never-never land of not quite. To be a Madame was to be the pinnacle of adulthood with all the glamor, power, beauty, and grace that can only be sustained in the mind of a child. Why would anyone want to do anything else, if a career such as this existed? Now that I am older I can look back at that childish image and smile, but at one time this was what I wanted to be more than anything else.

I am an adult now and I didn't grow up to be a Madame of a house of ill-repute. In my life now, I most often resemble the ringleader in a madhouse of anarchy. But sometimes, I wistfully remember the longing for flowers, gentleman callers, and enchantment that I think all of us have had at one time or another. Whatever that childhood ideal of adult life may have been.

My life did not turn out as I thought it would when I was young, nor did it even turn out as I had hoped when I was a young adult. I lived through my parents divorce, and their subsequent ones after that. I lived through foster care and after moving out on my own, an abusive marriage. But over the course of my life, I have learned things, about myself and about life, and I believe it has made me a better person, for all of the pain and confusion that came with the lessons.

I have learned to laugh, to love and to live my life joyfully. I have learned that I am a survivor, and for all the mistakes I have made along the way, every one of them was worth it in the end. My life is not glamorous, it is often messy, confusing and running just this side of chaos theory, with the occasional surprise thrown in. But, looking back on my life, I realize by and large it has been a helluva ride that I wouldn't exchange for anything.

In this book, I am a bit more cynical, a bit more mean, and a lot happier than in my last. Within these pages are my stories of rebuilding my life after escaping an abusive relationship and my numerous disastrous attempts at finding love. Even so, I've never let that stop me from trying one more time to get it right. I have learned to love unconditionally, even recklessly, and I have learned that I can have an open heart, and even if it hurts at times, know that I will live through it.

My mother taught me to love chaos, to embrace the joy of the moment and accept the oddity that is living. My father taught me to accept the universe as it is, not how I would wish it to be, and to never take it personally. Eula, my foster mother, taught me to accept people as they were and never hold their past against them, to take in those in need of help and to love them while they were with me. And Nev, my first husband, taught me that I am a survivor. That even the most terrible things can bring about something worth living for, something worth striving for, to be more than I had been before.

I do not believe I have any wisdom to share in this telling, nor is it an inspirational tale of achievement by overcoming adversity, it is simply my life that I have survived. For better or for worse, this is the mostly true, fairly accurate, and almost completely factual account of my life. Some liberties have been taken to protect the somewhat innocent and a few small embellishments were made for the sake of a good story.

Welcome to my roller coaster...

Chapter 1



On a cold, blustery February day, I found myself back in my hometown, broke, broken, alone and confused. In a daring escape, like something out of an old war movie, my mother had come to Phoenix and liberated me from my husband. In the dead of night, we had packed up ten boxes and two suitcases, slipping away quiet as death, to board a plane early the next morning.

In Phoenix, where I had been living for three years, it had been warm. Warm enough, that just the day before, I had swam in the pool outside our apartment with my two sons. Stepping off that plane in the Midwest, it was cold, snowing and miserable. My boys had never even seen snow in their young lives, and they were not impressed with either it or the cold. Loudly crying their objection to the entire situation. Shivering and blue, my mother hustled us into the terminal, and after claiming our baggage, out to her awaiting car.

It was a system shock for me and my sons. I had grown up in the Midwest, but after so many years of dry, desert heat, I was no more adapted to it than they were. Huddled down in the car, shivering in my thin coat, my mother blasted the heater to try and make us comfortable. But for most of the two-hour drive back to Quincy, the boys cried with the unfamiliar feeling of cold, and I was too emotionally and physically exhausted to do much more than tremble in the front seat. Both from the cold, and fear of the unknown, staring back at me.

I had no idea what I was going to do with my life at that moment. My only thought had been to get away, to flee while there was still time. Now that I had successfully escaped my former life, I had no idea what to do with the rest of it. I was completely broke, I did not, literally, have a dime to my name. Nev had not allowed me to touch any of our money in over two years. I had no access to any of our accounts, credit cards or even loose change. It had ensured that if I wanted or needed anything, I had to ask his permission to do so.

I had lost almost everything in my escape. Only taking the few items we had managed to

salvage before leaving, packed into the ten boxes my mother had mailed before our flight, that would be arriving sometime later that week. And, the few miscellaneous necessities we had been able to stuff into the two suitcases we now had with us. Most of that space had been taken up with items I would need for the boys, with very little space left over for me.

It was daunting.

And I was scared.

I had no idea what I was going to do. How I was going to live. What to even do with myself. For almost three years now, I had gradually given up almost any kind of independent thought, and now, suddenly, I was going to have to go it completely alone. I was terrified. What if I messed up? What if I made the wrong choice? How was I going to support myself and my two sons? What was I going to do?

I had absolutely no idea.

Staring out the window, watching the snow fall, shivering with the cold, and fear, I closed my eyes and silently cried for my lost life. For the friends I had left behind, for the loss of my marriage, for everything I had lost in my mad dash to get away.

Staying with my mother and her newest husband, I quickly realized I needed to find somewhere else to live. I had moved away from my mother when I was 15, and it was hard to be a child in her house again after so many years of being an adult. Not a well-functioning adult of late, but still an adult. I needed to get to a place where I could start becoming what I had lost after years of dependence and abuse. With my mother, I would always be her child, and treated as such. As much as she loved me, and was trying to help me, it was the last thing I needed if I was ever to be a functional human being again.

Although many of my friends from high school had moved on to other places after graduation, my friend LeeAnn and her husband had returned to Quincy before my own arrival. She had been offered a full scholarship to the university, and had happily moved back to town. They had been living in campus housing, but after a year in the dorms, decided to try and find a new place off campus with more room for the two of them.

Sharing the news with me that they were looking for a new place, they asked if I would like to join them. With barely a hesitation, I jumped at the chance to get out of my mother's house. Joining them in their search, we eventually found a two-bedroom apartment, not far from the university, at a price we could afford. Within two days of signing the lease, I moved from my

mother's into a new sort of life.

I still didn't have a job and had very little hope of getting any sort of support from Nev. I was still broke and dependent, but it was, at least, giving me a chance to try and figure out what I was going to do with my life. I had no education beyond high school, and Nev hadn't let me keep a job for any length of time while I lived in Phoenix, making my work history spotty at best, and a less than enticing employee for most employers.

But, I had some breathing room to try, and that was more than I had had before. It was time to begin again.

Chapter 1.1



To Suffer in Silence



Returning to Quincy, I kept a low profile. While there was comfort in the familiar, with family and friends to support me, there was also Nev's family nearby. I didn't want him to know where I lived and I did not want any contact with Nev, partially out of fear that I would break down and go back to him. I knew I wasn't strong enough yet to confront him, not yet. I had asked my family and friends not to share with his family where I might be living or give them any contact information, for now.

Learning of my return from her son, almost as quickly as I had arrived, Pat began contacting my family to advocate for her son, and my return to Phoenix. At first, I had objected, but his mother finally managed to persuade me to meet with her after several months of persistent harassment to my family. Agreeing to meet with her in a public space, and with a great deal of misgivings.

Arriving alone, I saw her sitting at a table, staring out the window. Pausing a moment, I looked down at her, "Hello Pat."

Sliding into the booth, we faced each other in uncomfortable silence. We had never gotten along. During the entire length of my relationship with her son, she had never once called me by name, always referring to me as "That Woman". His parents had money while mine had often been poor, only occasionally middle class, and she saw me as an anchor to her son's life. I had seen her as a mean, meddling bitch, who had not once had a nice thing to say to me or her grandsons in three years. We did not like each other, at all.

Staring at each other, she eventually said, "How have you been?"

Shrugging my shoulder's, I said, "Okay, I guess."

"How long do you plan on staying in Quincy, keeping my grandsons away from their father before you return?"

I didn't know how to respond to that. I had no plans of ever going back. Slowly, pausing

often, I began to describe the downward spiral of my marriage to her. About the abuse, the bruises, how he had begun controlling every aspect of my life, from what I ate to how I dressed, never allowing me to have money or able to move around freely towards the end.

Staring at me, not with concern or compassion, but with growing confusion, shaking her head often at my words. But she did, at least, allow me to continue without interruption. When at last I came to a stumbling halt, not sure what else to say, she looked me in the eye and said, "It is a woman's place to suffer in silence for her man."

"Huh?"

Sighing, as if trying to explain something to a difficult two-year-old, she began again, "It is only right that we suffer for our men. They are the head of the family, it is up to them to maintain discipline and order. If we, by being weak, need to be corrected by our husbands for our failures, that is their right."

In complete disbelief, I blurted out, "You *are* kidding me, right?"

"No."

I looked this woman over, as if for the first time. She was not uneducated, she had a Ph.D. She was successful in her own right, she had a career that paid her well, only recently retired. She was not poor, both she and her husband had made a great deal of money in their lifetimes. I had no idea what to say to her statements. They were jarring, rolling around, echoing in my head as I sat there looking at her.

"I'm sorry Pat." Quietly sitting back in the booth to put as much physical space between us as I could without leaving the table. "I can't do that. If I go back, he will kill me. Maybe not right away, but it will happen. I will not suffer in silence for him, not anymore. I will not be going back. Ever."

"But you have to, he's your husband."

"Not for much longer." Sighing, I shook my head. Listening to her was like having cold water splashed on my face. I realized that for him, what he had done was normal, expected, and completely acceptable, he had learned it at his mother's knee, so to speak. There was no saving him, or our relationship. All I could do at this point was to try and save myself.

Pushing myself up from the booth, I looked down at her and said, "I won't be going back. Don't ask me again. You can be a part of your grandsons' lives, but not unsupervised. If you want to see them, I will bring them to you, at a park or a public place, but you will not do to my sons what you allowed to be done to yours."

"You can't do that!" She exclaimed, pushing her way up from the booth to stand before me.

"Yes. I can. And I am." Turning to walk away, I looked back at her one more time, still standing in front of the booth where I had left her. "I'm sorry that it has to be this way. Tell Nev when you talk to him next, I won't be coming back. Don't look for me. Don't try to contact me. It's over."

Pushing open the door, I stepped out into the sunlight. Looking up at the sky, I felt its warmth on my face, and a small weight lifted from my heart. And I realized that it was at that moment that I had truly decided to leave him. It had not been back in Phoenix, scared for my life. Or on my return home. Or even as I had, haltingly, began making plans for my life once I had moved in with LeeAnn and Vern. But there, standing in the sunlight, I let go of all my secret hopes of salvaging my marriage and returning to my life back in Phoenix. With a lighter step, I went home, to truly begin my new life.

Chapter 1.2



A New Life



Without a cent to my name, two small sons and ten boxes, I was starting my journey, for the first time in my life, completely on my own. Leaving behind almost everything in Phoenix, all those things people accumulate as they pass through their lives, were now gone. I was beginning again.

This whole starting a new life thing was hard. I had started with less three years ago when I had moved to Phoenix but had also been single, unencumbered by children and had a nice wad of cash to start my new life with from all the jobs I had taken while in high school. Now, I was broke, had two small children completely dependent on me and nowhere near the amount of confidence I had once started out with.

Living with LeeAnn and Vern helped me regain some of my lost confidence, a chance to learn to be on my own again while still having someone to turn to when I needed help. As a college student, her group of friends opened my eyes to other possibilities and opportunities. I still didn't know for sure what I wanted, but at least I was becoming more comfortable with the idea of making my own decisions.

But, after several months living with LeeAnn and Vern, as helpful as it had been, I made a decision I wasn't comfortable with, but one that had to be made nonetheless. With all of us in a small apartment, it was beginning to wear on our friendship. Small grievances began to pile up between us. So, after only two months of living together, for the sake of our friendship, I packed up my few belongings and moved back in with my mother.

It wasn't the best place for me. Nothing had really changed, but I had little choice, and so, with a lot of misgivings, I returned to her home. Pouring over the newspapers every day for work, I did eventually find a fast food place that was willing to hire me. It wasn't a great job, but it was work and that's all that really mattered. For a month, I saved every penny with the sole goal of moving out on my own.

When I was ready, I once again began pouring through the newspapers and found an apartment big enough for me and the boys, within walking distance to work and in my limited price range. Signing the lease papers, I felt for the first time in a long time, a faint whiff of independence and hope. I still had almost no possessions, but at least I had a place I could call mine.

Staring at my new apartment, with nothing but the cribs for the boys, their toys, and a few small miscellaneous items, I smiled. This was it. I was finally, starting my new life. No one to tell me what to do or how to behave anymore. No one else setting the rules or telling me how to arrange my life. I had a job, an apartment, some spare change in my pocket, and absolutely no clue what to do next.

Taking a deep breath to settle my thumping heartbeat, I sat down in the middle of the floor and starting thinking. Not just about now, as I had done for so many years as I struggled to survive Nev, or even more recently as I dealt with leaving him, but about my future. What did I want out of life? Who did I want to be? And the answer was, I had no idea. Not a single inkling of where to go from there.

I had been living in the now so much, I had forgotten how to think about the future. I had forgotten my own dreams, my own wants, during my time with Nev. And as the whole world of possibilities settled down on me, I felt small under the weight of it all. I felt paralyzed by the idea of my own freedom. What if I messed up? What if I made a mistake? What if I had made a mistake coming back to Quincy, giving up my life out in Phoenix? What if everything I had done was wrong and what if I continued to make the wrong choices? Oh, god. What was I going to do now?

Then hearing my sons in the next room, and responding to their needs, I stood back up. They needed me. They needed me to figure this out so that they could have a chance at a decent life. They needed me to pull myself together. Somehow, some way, I had to, for all of us. I just had no idea how.

Working my way through my days, in fits and starts, I slowly began filling it. Beginning with our immediate needs, I acquired furniture to sit on, and a bed to sleep in, no headboard or frame, but better than the blanket pallet I had been sleeping in on the floor. A small black & white tv mostly for the boys, with only two channels, but I was getting there. Going to thrift stores, yard sales and swap meets, I bought things for my kitchen, a dresser for our clothes, a

table to eat at. My place looked like a third-hand trinket shop, nothing matched, most of it was old and threadbare, but it was mine.

But during my time with Nev, I had forgotten many things, like how to laugh, interact with people naturally, or make decisions on my own. Deciding what to pick from a menu could make me break out into a cold sweat. I would find myself retreating inward when there were large groups of people around, whether they were close family or strangers in a public place. I continually scanned for exits when I went anywhere and positioned myself in any room with my back to the wall so that I could watch every person and no one could sneak up on me. I was living more inside my head than I was in the real world.

I could barely tolerate physical contact. I had to force myself to accept hugs and other small physical gestures, but people could sense the reluctance no matter how hard I tried to hide it. It isolated me from the warm companionship that I had once so easily had before in my life and I missed it desperately.

I started seeing a counselor and I went a few times, but found her almost completely useless. She told that I should just forget about it, move on, go back to the familiar and try to pick my life up from where it was before the abuse had started. But I had changed, my world had changed too much to go back to how I had been before. I didn't even know who that person was anymore.

I found myself spending most of my time alone or with my sons, continuing unconsciously the isolation that had once been imposed by Nev. I clung to habits that had kept me moderately safe before, but now made me look like either an idiot or crazy to everyone around me. If I was to be completely honest, I was quite nuts at this point. Functional, but nuts.

I cried a lot, alone in my apartment, with only my sons for company. Missing my old life, missing Nev, and then hating myself for it. As hard as I was trying to get my life in order, it was just as quickly spiraling out of control as I began to sink deeper into depression and self-loathing. I began to suffer from severe insomnia, often staying awake for days at a time, further adding to my mental distress.

Months after returning from Phoenix, I was suffering through another a bout of insomnia. Yet another night of lying awake on my couch staring at my small black & white TV, and unable to sleep no matter how tired I felt. I resigned myself, yet again, to another night of listless wakefulness. As the night went on, the programming turned to infomercials without me really paying attention to what was on. With only two channels to choose from, it really didn't matter anyway. Mostly, I just wanted the company of sound in the quiet of the night.

Watching aimlessly, a bright, happy woman came on, staring straight out of the screen, and began talking about her fitness program and how great it was. She gleefully droned on for a while about the wonders of her program, then she paused. Looking straight at the camera, she said, "After my divorce all I did was sit on my couch, cry, eat ice cream and plot my husband's death," Sitting up, she had my full attention. She could have been talking directly to me with those words, "and then one day, I decided that I was either going to spend the rest of my life letting his memory control my life, making me miserable, or I could get up and do something about it." And she was right, I needed to get up and do something about it. I didn't want to sit miserable on my couch anymore, cry and plot Nev's death.

I don't know why this fitness-happy woman connected so much for me. Or why her words stirred something inside me when everything else had left me unmoved. Maybe it was her cheerful smile as she talked about her husband's demise. Maybe it was her bright, confident attitude as she talked about changing her life for the better. Or maybe it was her gleeful happiness about how much she hated her ex. But, whatever it was, it changed my life.

In the middle of the night, I had an epiphany. I could spend the rest of my life miserable or I could do something about it. I didn't have to sit around waiting for time to heal all wounds. I didn't have to go back to being the person I used to be. I could change the course of my life instead of waiting for life to change me.

I didn't know exactly what to do, but I did know what I didn't want to do anymore. This was not the life I wanted, this was not the life I wanted for my sons. I needed to change. I couldn't go back to the person I was, that person was a stranger to me now, and I wasn't even sure if I liked the person I had been. I didn't know who I was going to be, yet, but I was not going to be as I had been before. I didn't want to be just another victim, living scared and hiding from the world for the rest of my life.

And so, I set out to change my life.

I began to think once again of going to college. I had earned a scholarship in high school from the University of Arizona, but with Nev's arrival in Phoenix and a new baby on the way, thoughts of going to college had been put aside. But now, I found myself thinking about it again.

With trembling hope, I applied to the community college in town and was accepted for fall classes. I didn't want to work in fast food all my life, and this was a means to get me to where I wanted to be. I was beginning to have dreams of maybe getting a Ph.D. someday, life permitting. But for now, I was content to study hard and focus on gaining my Associates

degree.

I began reconnecting with my friends, going out more and spending less time alone. I started making other small changes, gaining confidence in my ability to make a choice growing each day. I began working on how I interacted with people, worked on smiling, and opening myself up to the possibility of living again. I made a conscious effort to engage with people, strike up a conversation with new people while out with friends, and became more comfortable with whoever it was I was becoming.

My life began to take on meaning beyond living day to day. I had filled my apartment, and then my life and my soul with something beyond simple survival, I had hope. Real, honest hope for the first time in what seemed a lifetime, and maybe it was. For my entire life, I had always belonged to someone or something else, my parents, the court system while in foster care, and with only a short breath of freedom of three months, before Nev had come to make his claim on my life.

Looking around at all I had accomplished, I felt proud of all I had done, so far removed from when I had first arrived. I was free, perhaps for the first time in my life, to go out and make a huge mess of it. All on my own...

Chapter 1.3



A Memory Returns



"Lisa!" Turning to the sound of my name I saw a face, once dearly loved and never forgotten.

"Billy?" A little flustered at seeing him again after all these years. Our breakup had not been pretty, leaving me devastated and changing the course of my life.

"Hey! It's good to see you." Smiling happily at me as he jogged over from where he had first called my name. "How have you been?"

"Not too bad. I stopped by your Mom's a few months ago for a visit, letting her know I had moved back to town. She said you were in Germany."

"Yeah, I'm only back on leave before they send me to Panama next." Reaching out to give me a hug, "She said you were back, but didn't know where you were living now." Stepping back away from his embrace, I looked him over. He was looking good, fit and strong, and I felt the old pull towards him.

"I heard things didn't work out with Ali." Wanting to dig at him a little bit. She had been the reason for our break up all those years ago. I would never forget that phone call, how much it had hurt, telling me we had to end our engagement. Breaking the news badly that he had just gotten married a few hours before, because he had gotten her pregnant.

Looking uncomfortable, he stared down at his feet that were shuffling around on their own below him. Giving me a half shrug, he said, "Yeah... I was stupid."

"Yes, you were."

"What about you and Nev? I heard you left him earlier this year and came back home."

Still feeling very uncomfortable talking about Nev, I tensed, then replied, "It didn't work out."

Watching him cast about for something to say, he eventually asked, "You want to go out for dinner sometime with me?"

"I... uh," I wasn't sure what to say. I was equally torn between wanting to say yes, while

simultaneously wanting to scream in his face to get away from me. It was a dilemma. So instead, I stood there like an idiot, staring down at my feet.

Gently reaching out, he lifted my chin and looking me in the eyes, said "It's just dinner Lisa, not the end of the world. Say yes, and we'll go wherever you want."

Looking at him, seeing his smile that had always managed to convince me to agree to things I knew I shouldn't, I gave in to him and said yes.

Giving him my address, we set up a date only days away that started a whirlwind that lasted until he left for Panama three weeks later. Falling back into old patterns, he came by almost every day to see me. We went out for lunches and dinners, drove around in his car and spent quiet time watching movies on my couch. We took the boys to the park, and he rolled around with them on the floor while I watched him happily interacting with them. We went out to his parent's house for dinner, and once, even made a trip up to see his ex-wife and two children. Amazingly enough, we got along and had a wonderful weekend together.

The last week of his visit was a sad/happy time. He came over every day, stayed every night and talked for hours about our lives, our mistakes and how much he had missed me after all this time. But as time slipped by, Billy began to push for us to resume our relationship where we left off. He wanted us to get married as soon as I was divorced and move down to Panama with him. And I wasn't ready. Not for the intensity of the relationship, to be married almost as quickly as I was divorced, and most definitely not move to a foreign country surrounded by people I didn't know. Hell, I had failed my Sophomore year of Spanish! After a year of classes, I couldn't do more than say "please", "thank you" and ask for the time. I did not have the gift for languages that Billy did.

Yet, even so, before he left, with my heart pounding and a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach, I found myself agreeing to an engagement. I had many ambivalent feelings about it, but I had never stopped loving Billy, and loved his family just as much. Maybe this was the second chance I had been looking for, and I was simply too afraid to realize it. Or last least, that's what I kept telling myself.

With Billy's leaving, I began to spend even more time with his family. Laura had never been happy with his marriage to Ali and losing me as a daughter-in-law had been a large part of it. Now that Billy and I were back together, Laura and I could happily resume our relationship that had been cut short by our break up. Years before, I had not wanted to put Laura in an awkward situation between me and Billy, and so reluctantly, I had distanced myself from his family. But now, all that had changed, and I was warmly welcomed back as part of the family.

Something I had very much missed.

Once Billy was settled in Panama, he began calling me once a week, but was only able to talk for a few short minutes at a time. Instead, he sent long letters filled with pictures and lists of things we would do together as soon as we got married. He told me of the beaches he'd been to, the people he had met, and all the things he wanted to share with me as his excitement grew with each passing day. Everyone seemed happy about the situation, except me.

Marrying Billy meant an end to all the things I had been working towards, or at least, they would have to be put on hold. My plans to attend college in the fall, something I had dreamt of for so long, would once again have to wait. My independence, something I treasured even as I groped for it, would have to be set aside in the new reality of "we". Like mist slipping through my fingers, I was once again losing myself in someone else's life. I began to feel a growing resentment in all that I would have to give up to be with him. I wasn't ready for this, any of it. I had just barely begun to rebuild my life and now I was being asked to give all that away. To lose me, yet again, to become a we.

I loved him. I had never stopped. But I knew that I was not ready. I wasn't ready to date again, much less go to the whole "until death do us part" section of a relationship. I still hadn't gotten the hang of ordering for myself from a menu or learning how to do all the thousands of small independent things adults do every day without thinking. I had to constantly remind myself not to flinch when touched, and most importantly, I had not yet learned to say "No."

Because I knew I had said yes to Billy, because I couldn't say no. Not to him, not to anyone. And that was not a good enough reason to get married. I may have loved him and he may have loved me, but fear of saying no to someone wasn't a good enough reason to commit my life to him. But, I couldn't express it in words.

I began to become restless, dreading his phone calls, no longer smiling when the phone rang. I didn't want to confront him with my fears, yet I knew that I should. I waffled back and forth in an endless agony of indecision, unable, or unwilling, to stand up for myself against his enthusiasm. So instead, I took the coward's way out.

On a night that I knew Billy would be calling, I took someone else into my bed. Afterward, I stared up at the ceiling, knowing the phone would ring at any time. The guy next to me innocently unaware of the trouble he was about to cause, babbled on about something. I let the rhythm of his voice lull me without paying attention to the shape of his words as I waited.

When the phone rang, I reached out to answer it, hearing Billy's familiar voice. "Hey baby, how's it going?"

"I'm a little busy now, I have company." Hearing this, the poor innocent sap next to me asked, "Who are you talking to?"

Hearing that voice, from a thousand miles away, Billy echoed, "Who's that?!"

"I brought a friend home tonight, I was lonely." Ignoring Sap while I talked.

"I see..." came his slow response, "anyone I know?"

Shaking my head in the dark, I quietly answered, "No."

"Lisa, is there something you want to tell me?" Feeling the floodgates of emotion open at that question, I couldn't, at first, say anything. I had been trying to tell him this since we first saw each other, I wasn't ready. I couldn't be ready. I needed more time, more space to get to know this new person I was becoming. I couldn't explore a new relationship with the old one still hanging around inside my head. I couldn't give myself to someone else when I didn't even know who I was yet.

But I couldn't speak any of those words. None of them. Instead, I said, "I slept with someone else tonight. I'm sorry."

"I see." Came his terse response. He didn't, but that was okay. "I guess I will talk to you later then." Hanging up the phone before I could say anything else.

With equal parts sadness and relief, I hung up the phone. Looking over at Sap, he asked, "Who was that?"

"No one, just my ex-boyfriend."

Chapter 1.4



I just buy 'em a house



Sitting outside the courthouse waiting to go in to finalize my divorce, Tom Petty's "*Yer so bad*" came on the radio, bringing a small smile to my face as I listened to the words while I screwed up my courage. With the last strains of the song playing, I squared my shoulders and prepared for my day in court.

A divorce is never easy. It's harder if you are 21 years old and escaping an abusive husband. Having to stand up in a room full of strangers and forced to speak words you never wanted to be known, to justify the ending of a marriage that had lasted less than three years. Mercifully, my soon to be ex-husband was not there and after only a brief consultation, I was granted my freedom by the courts.

Walking from the courtroom my mother turned to me and said, "I need a drink." and I couldn't have agreed more.

My mother chose a bar near the river that had once been a favorite drinking spot of hers years ago. It was an older one that had been around for years, dim even with the morning light shining brightly outside its windows. A smoky haven for the dedicated drinkers, third shift workers, and us.

Looking completely out of place in this seedy establishment, silent eyes watched over half empty glasses, following our progress as we bellied up to the bar. Dismissing their unspoken disapproval at our intrusion into their world, my mother waved over the bartender and ordered.

Taking our drinks in hand, my mother turned to me and raising hers in a half salute, which I returned. Tasting the alcohol, with its slow, familiar burn as it went down, gradually beginning to ease the fears that I had been holding in all morning. It was over, finally and completely over.

Staring down into my now almost empty glass, I sighed as I watched the ice clink down in its

newly uncovered state. As if drawn to that soft sound, the bartender returned, "Another?" He inquired.

With an affirmative nod from both of us, we began round two.

By our third round, a warm camaraderie had begun to envelop me and my mother as the bar accepted us as one of their own.

One gentleman at the end of the bar had been telling stories to the amusement of those around him since we had walked in. He wasn't too particular who his audience was, directing them at anyone who happened to be looking his way. Even our entrance had barely caused him to pause between stories. After a while though, our clothes and somber, if sloshed, demeanor attracted his attention.

"So," he began, "what brings the two of here to this fine establishment so early in the day?"

"Divorce." my mother answered.

"Ah," giving a vague wave at nothing, "condolences."

"No, no," my Mother said, pointing at me, "my daughter's, not mine."

"I'm going to guess your first then?" Nodding, I agreed. "Don't let it get to you." Giving me a wink as he said it.

I shrugged, not sure what to say or how to express the equal parts devastation and delight I was experiencing. The alcohol had been slowly chipping away at the hard ball of tension that had settled in my stomach before going into court. And as my tension had diminished, I found myself beginning to smile at the random comments and conversation going on around me.

Moving down to sit closer to us, he and my mother began exchanging stories, laughing as they did so. Looking over at me on occasion as they swapped stories, and buying each other rounds, they continued to talk. I had little to say, but enjoyed the feeling of being included while I drank whatever was put before me.

Eventually, the stories shifted over to talk of relationships, generally broken ones, were exchanged between the two of them, with random interjections by those sitting nearby. Happily married people aren't known for early day drinking in a bar, or if they are, they don't stay happily married for long.

Once more smiling at me, the happy storyteller said, "I'll tell you the secret of my happiness."

"Okay," I agreed, willing to listen to whatever improbable tale he had to tell.

"I've been married three times," looking me straight in the eye, holding up three fingers above his head, then slapped the bar with his hand for emphasis, "and it was getting damned expensive!"

"I can imagine so." Completely agreeing with him.

"So now, whenever I get that marrying urge again, I start looking around the bar for someone completely wrong for me and I just buy 'em a house!" I started to laugh, "No, no..." waving both of his hands in front of me, "it's a perfect solution, I end up in exactly the same position I would have, without all that drama of the in between parts, leaving me the time to sit miserably happy in the bar without interruption."

Giving me a wicked grin, he patted the barstool beside him and said, "So, what kind of house would you like, dear lady?"

Shaking my head at his offer, but giving him the first truly genuine laugh I had had in almost three years, I said, "A nice one."

***I hope you have enjoyed this preview of Wine Comes in Six-Packs
and that you will continue on my journey with me
through my misadventures in living.***