

**The Life You Save:
The Journey to Greyhound Gang**

by Claudia Presto

CHAPTER ONE

Started June 22. Finished July 4, 1993

"Cheshire Puss", she (Alice) began... "would you please tell me which way I ought to go from here?" "That depends on where you want to get to," said the cat.

No major revelations on where I want to get to, but I thought I'd share some of where I've been. Place-wise, Darien, Ct., East Arlington, Vt., Saratoga Springs, NY, Cooperstown, NY, Westfield, NY, Elkhart, Indiana and Chicago. Head-wise, I've no clue!

But I've impressed the hell out of myself right now because I've managed to hook-up this computer, sort of figure out Word Perfect, and I am typing. Now I just need to be creative so you all can get the first installment of "Gone With Claudia". I still haven't come up with the perfect "tag" for this adventure. So any and all ideas are very welcome! My first set of business cards (some may be included in here) say ...On The Run. I signed my magazine queries with Movin' and Groovin'. On The Road is taken. Words like journey, quest, adventure need something with it...so maybe by the next letter I'll have thought of something!

Anyway enough dribbling and drabbling. Here comes the first chapter! Drum roll please! As most of you are aware, I've chucked it all. The job, the entanglements, the possessions. Yep, the convertible, the antique brass bed, 47 pairs of high heels, the life size carousel horse, the boyfriend, many earrings (I still have too many)... and I'm heading west.

When asked, I say I'm headed to New Mexico or Arizona. But what I'm really looking for is a place with acres of animals, unspoiled surroundings, driving range in the back, cultural diversity and warm weather. I've adopted the philosophy "find it and the job will come".

My northern route journey for the next month includes many stops with friends. Wonderful fabulous generous friends who are letting me pretend I've started my journey while staying in the comfort of their hearts and homes! So far, I'm 2 for 2. I've been to two friend's houses and managed to get them to say, "Don't leave! Come live with us!"

HOW I'M GETTING WHEREVER IT IS I'M GOING

In my 24 years of car ownership I've been the proud owner of adorable, sporty VWs and Toyota's. Most of them convertibles. I have traded in that image now to be the owner of a 1/2 ton, two tone, bronze and beige Chevy Silverado pickup.

This rig is bigger than big. It is a major thump beat of America. It has a cap on the 8 ft bed, also two tone. The cap rises in the back to give it a streamlined look - who's kidding who - streamline a 1/2 ton truck? I'm on the NJ Turnpike approaching the toll booth. It says cars only. Do I not qualify to go into those toll booths anymore? And I go into a mall parking lot

and my antenna bends over backwards. I jump out to screw it off and realize that I have about 2 inches left between my streamlined cap and the ceiling. Clearance signs! I have to read clearance signs.

And the rig doesn't end there. I am also towing a 16 foot trailer camper. And all this is happening to a person who never even liked to hike with a pack on her back. Now I'm one of those road hogging turtles. I bought this particular unit because the owner raises birds in her home, the trailer was made in Canada and it has a light grey and dusty rose interior, much nicer than all the american made brown interiors.

This camper has all I need to set up shop whenever I get to where ever I'm going. All ideas for places to go and people to see are welcome! I have a toilet and shower, a refrigerator, 3 burners, a full length mirror, sleeping room for 6 (actually, now only 4 cause I turned one bed into storage for all my clothes). I'm stocked with rice krispies, marshmallows, Uncle Dave's bloody Mary mix, beer and caramel nips. I have one suit, too many shirts, 15 pairs of underwear, 10 pairs of shoes, 38 pairs of earrings, a horse on a stick that neighs, 3 stuffed animals and an Orvis dog bed in Southwestern motif. Men, up to 6' 4", will fit comfortably inside the camper.

MY TRAVELING COMPANIONS

My faithful greyhound, Slim, has his traveling quarters in the back of the pick-up. He has a traveling bowl of water, more dog biscuits than some dogs get in a lifetime, his LL Bean dog bed and great views of the passing surroundings. He's run off about 3 times so far, but I manage to catch him when he stops to pee.

My sister Susan's cockatiel, Hosehead, more affectionately called the "Hoser", is riding shotgun with me. His cage rests on a down pillow and he is learning to say "on the road, Hoser"! Everywhere I stop he regales people with his singing abilities and they all want to adopt him. I may have to sell him to pay for my trip soon though. (see section on First Day)

GETTING IT ALL DONE (and said)

It was hard and not so hard to get rid of things in my life. I spent the first month or so, just moving things around the apartment, pretending I was getting rid of things. I frequented 4 consignment/thrift stores weekly with bags and hangers of clothes. My furniture went quickly thru advertised sales and to relatives. The carousel horse was bought for a granddaughter.

As long as things were still hidden in closets, cabinets etc. I thought I was getting somewhere. It wasn't until I opened those doors and brought items into the open that I started to panic. Think about it, those drawers where you just stuff things into and haven't looked through in years. I had so much baggage to give away, throw away, store away - just plain do away with. Getting rid of the physical junk, though, is a lot easier than getting rid of

all the mental stuffing that jams the compartments in my head. It'll be a while before those cobwebs unravel. I'm working on them strand by strand.

STAYING IN TOUCH

I fancy myself a hermit, but my phone bills and address book attests to me being a very social person. I love my friends. I LOVE my friends. I love MY friends. I love my FRIENDS. And there's no way I want to be out of touch. So I now have an 800# where you can have no excuse to be out of touch! The enclosed business card (compliments of Wendy and Wilkey and their print shop in Greenwich) has the number. - but here it is again just in case. 1-800-SKY-TALK. (1-800-759-8255). Then enter my pin # 8018020 and hit the # sign. You'll then hear a message from me about where I am, and can leave me a message too. I know, I know, this is too much. so USE IT! Abuse It!

FIRST DAY

And I thought I was having an adventure up to now. Here goes a very fast synopsis of my first day on the road. It's a good thing I only chose to believe in the omens I want to, or I would have turned right around and high-tailed it home.

A sharp, dank, oily smell assaulted my and Hoser's nostrils one and a half hours into the trip on I-87 headed to Albany. I look in the side mirror and see white smoke billowing from below the truck. I look at the gauges. They're Ok. I look straight ahead. More white smoke from the hood. I pull over, roll up the windows before the bird and I expire. I pull out the Chevy handbook, read about overheating and get out of the truck. I get the hood open and stand there staring at the engine. I've seen guys do that, I figure I'll have a mechanical revelation or something. I get out the emergency kit that Scott provided me and try to light a flare. Five minutes later, the flare is lit and I'm setting up the portable CB my dad gave me. I press the talk button and say, "Breaker 1 9, damsel in distress can you help?" Within 3 minutes a trucker pulls over and tells me I have transmission problems, and that there is a gas station about 5 miles down the road. So I get to a gas station, they send me to a transmission station, then I spend 3 hours while Joe, who's owned the shop for 20 years tells me what's wrong, installs an extra cooler and explains all about how my transmission works. So I get in and continue to Vt - and run into a major gale and rain storm. I drive by Margot and Tom's house during this torrential downpour and Margot's doing the worry stand-by-the-door routine. We wave at each other. I pull into a parking lot and wait for the rain to end. Margot gets into her car and visits me at the parking lot. Then I can't get the truck/trailer into their driveway and a horse trailer driver named Piggy, stops by and does it for me. And transmission fluid gets dumped all over the road.

The next day the truck goes into a local Vt shop owned by Rob, his wife Stick and their 4 Saymoeds. Two days later, with savior Rob working into the night, it is fixed. It appears the trans was never attached to the train, the fluids for the trans and engine were filthy and

had never been changed, the new cooler was hooked up incorrectly. Blah, Blah, Blah as Brooke (Margot and Tom's kid) would say.

"So it goes, on and on." And Vermont memories of applying tattoos, stopping to watch roadside while an adolescent moose nonchalantly chows down on grass, catching a glimpse of brother and sister (in catcher's mitt and pads) playing ball in their front yard, laughing while a black afghan puppy frolics in a pond and being entranced by the luminescence of a bright crescent moon in a deep blue sky, remain.

STORY

Two weeks ago, I was walking Slim in the field near my house. A horse show was going on, so I had him on leash. A policeman, driving around the field stopped to flirt with me. We gab about Slim, he tells me about his shepherd and asks where I'm from. I hesitated slightly, but then told him I was from Norwalk but was moving West in a few days. It was as if I'd said the magic words. He started drilling me about why I was doing what I was doing, how I was doing it, where was the money coming from, what was I doing with my home, my possessions. He questioned me incessantly, and I was trying to figure out how to end this conversation, when he stated for the fifth time, "I've always wanted to do what you're doing." I'd been nice long enough, so I just blurted as I walked away, "Well, you can do it! Just make up your mind! Jeez, you could even come with me!"

Never giving it another thought, I went to the field a few days later. One of the regulars comes up to me and says, "there's this guy been asking for you everyday." I had no clue who she was talking about. And then striding over the hill comes the policeman and his shepherd. Hovering over me, he blurts out, "I've been looking for you all week. I'm so glad I found you. I have 30 days coming to me, I'd like to go with you."

I was staggered by the longing in his words. And at a loss on how to respond, I was embarrassed he'd taken our conversation so literally. "So you've been thinking a lot about our conversation", was my response finally. For 15 minutes, he talked about his 29 years as a policeman, the \$20,000 dining room table he could sell, the land in Florida he owned, the tedium of his life. He ended shyly with, "so I thought maybe you'd want some company and it would be a good way for me to start."

I left two days later for my journey...alone.

CHAPTER TWO

Started 6/23. Ended 7/15/1993.

I was going through my black day planner, one remnant of Prodigy that I'd kept, and I'd written something, I'd read somewhere, that I'd forgotten I'd put in there -

Symptoms of Inner Peace

1. Think & act spontaneously rather than from past fears
2. Ability to enjoy each moment
3. Loss of interest in judging self
4. Loss of interest in judging others
5. Loss of interest in conflict
6. Loss of interest in interpreting the actions of others
7. Loss of ability to worry
8. Frequent episodes of appreciation
9. Contented feelings of connectedness with others and nature
10. Smiling through the eyes of the heart
11. Susceptibility to love from others and to others
12. Let things happen rather than make them happen

I am constantly in awe of how your past ends up having a connection with your present or your future. I was in the Black Hills 13 years ago, and I had felt the pull of the area then. I'm here now, and I don't want to leave. I'd found the above passage over a year ago, and here I am trying to incorporate those statements into my soul. Hoser and I had a moment together, captured on tape, when we wailed, screeched and howled to Meatloaf's Paradise By the Dashboard Lights. We were Sonny and Cher, Captain and Tennile, Ben and Jerry. Charna, a best girlfriend from Improv Olympics in Chicago, teaches in her Improv classes that the best acting happens when you listen, go with the flow and make connections. Her book, "Truth in Comedy" opens with:

If you want to know where we went wrong, we needn't look too far.
For where we'll be and where we've been, is always where we are.

And everything that comes your way is something you once gave.
Somebody feels the water, every time you make a wave...
Thom Bishop

CAMPING

This entry needs a preface. In 1980, when I traveled the country for two months I had a tent. I only used the tent for 1 week. Instead I slept outside on a pad, in my bag, on the ground. In Mesa Verde, I awoke one night to a buck grazing not 3 feet from my head. In Durango, I fell asleep watching a meteor shower for hours with two little girls. When I got home I slept on my porch for two weeks because I couldn't get used to a bed.

And now, I'm in a RV KOA campground. I feel like I've been abducted by aliens and brought to their home base. There is no aesthetic value to an RV. NONE. They are big and huge and unwieldy. And it appears that they procreate like rabbits. They are all over the place! My little trailer however is very cute. I have water and electric hooked up, but I have no intention of using either. I'll probably be asleep before it's dark, and these campgrounds all have showers. It was a pull through site, so I didn't even have to maneuver to park. I wanted a no fuss dinner, so I bought English muffins, sauce and cheese and made little pizzas in the toaster oven. I had 4 of them. I was hungry. So was Hoser. But he didn't like the pieces with the sauce on them.

The next night I stayed in a motel and watched Drop Dead Fred. A silly movie about a not so imaginary friend trying to put the child back into an adult's life. Connections, connections.

PET UPDATE

I'm worried about the Hoser. He just did a major sneeze. Also, I have yet to see him drink water. I've been rearranging the water in his cage, thinking he just doesn't get it - but I don't think he gets it no matter where I put it. He also does some strange stuff like going into a corner of the cage and just staying there. He also thinks he's a rooster. I get a very early wake-up call every morning. Even though I securely put a towel over his entire cage. That's another reason I'm going to bed early tonight.

Slim had to get more stitches in his toe, as the others came out. But these seem to be holding and he doesn't seem to be trying to take these out himself. He's trying hard to adjust and loves the trailer and the truck. I could watch him jump in the truck all day long, as he leaps effortlessly from ground to truck bed. A complete contrast to my grunting and groaning as I pull myself up in it. The one problem he's giving me is that he refuses to let me go anywhere without him. This habit becomes extremely annoying when I go to the bathroom and leave him in the trailer. He howls until I return. Hoser also chimes in with his screeches. I might as well go outside my trailer for all the privacy I'm getting.

I have a major photo opportunity and no camera. (That broke the first day on the trip too) I'm sitting at the table in the trailer, typing. Hoser is next to me in the cage. Slim (Mr. Photogenic) is on the bed, at the opposite end of the trailer. His Orvis bean bag bed is on our sofa bed, it's all fluffed up, and his front half is strewn across it, while his lanky torso is on the real bed. Dog on holiday. He could compete with Fay Ray.

THE JOURNEY

I spent a week in Chicago with Charna and Gracie. Slim gained back the 5 pounds he'd lost. I invested more mega transmission dollars into the truck. And we saw Jurassic Park, Last Action Hero, What's Love Got To Do With It, The Dead Zone, Mediterraneo, Escape to New York, and are still arguing about whether it was acid or phiranas in the vat in the cellar in House On A Haunted Hill. Charna just called and said she rented the movie and it was acid. any phirana believers out there?. We didn't just watch movies, we also got pedicures and Charna got her ears pierced. I saw Chris Isaak in an interview, and feel in love even more.

When will he realize I can make him happy? And I was wondrously entertained by Charna's troupe of Improv men - all younger than me. And you know how much I like younger men...

Improv Knight

I wore a blue denim dress, back-buttoned, scooped neck, and above the knee. Scuffed, faded, cowboy boots on my feet and a parrot tattoo on my left breast. I had just turned 40, sold my VW Karmann Ghia convertible, 47 pairs of high heels and water view home and was headed west in a Chevy Silverado pick-up, hauling a camper trailer. The truck, bought used, but promised to be mechanically sound, had just broken down for the third time in three weeks.

I had my first beer at 6 pm and with \$10 in my boot headed to the show. The show, Improv Olympic, was developed, Emceed and produced by my Chicago pal, Charna. A fast-talking, fast-thinking, dark haired whirl of business and comedy, Charna always had accolades fawning over her, and men buying her drinks. I hoped to snag a few of those drinks, and I was ready to laugh and party while watching two troupes of gorgeous mid-twenty year olds, practice the art of improvisation. Flinging minds and bodies from one end of the stage to the other as they weaved audience suggestions into works of art.

I was well into my third beer, with one of Charna's main Improv guys, Ali. A veteran of improve stage, his dark good looks and Ivy League education made him a crowd favorite. Designating himself my personal Master of Ceremonies and he insisted we carry on our own Improv routines. An unsuspecting guy would walk by our stools, and Ali would grab his collar and haul him over for my inspection. White socks with anything but sneakers were rapid thumbs down. Gold necklaces earned any guy a boot kick back into the masses. I was corralled by laughing vibrant sweet flesh. Shots were ordered. The guys' drinks were Rumple-something, I, in the memory of Thelma and Louise, downed Wild Turkey.

The show over, we piled downstairs to the bar where Ali and I continued our round-up. I taught him the hand-slap game. One person has their hands palms up, while the other person's hands cover theirs. The person with palms up tries to slap the other person's hands before they can move them. Charna, unbeknownst to me, watched all this and wondered aloud with the bartender whether to leave Ali and me and go home. She ventured over to check on my condition, weaving her way through throngs of barring 20-something year olds dressed in khaki shorts, white T's and hiking boots. Roped to her were two of those boys.

I think we were introduced, but my memory is only of leaning on his shoulder, and clutching his hand, while he crooned into my ear for an eternity. He was Tim. 24. Aspiring actor. Former choir boy. Wild blonde hair. Stubble. A smattering of curly chest hair.

My next memory was THE KISS. Long, languous and luscious. How long? I have no memory of that. How languous? I could have spent days. How luscious? Sweeter than any summer fruit just pulled from the tree, and bit into with liquid flowing down your chin. When I opened my eyes, I realize that we are outside the bar. Against the wall of the theatre, right

near the front door. I don't remember leaving the bar, but I do remember thinking, "we can't do this here", and I grabbed his hand and ran with him down the streets of Chicago. An alley loomed ahead of us and we dove for it. Running deeper and deeper, we merged with the cement of the alley and emerged three hours later, not sure of each other's names, where we were or what had happened. I'm still not sure. The clearest memory is the loss of all memory of who I was and where I was. The reality is one missing half moon blue stone earring, and cement burns on my elbows, back and knees. The reality is the tingles of warmth that pulse through my body whenever I think of him. The reality is I'll never see him again.

back to reality...

So the truck has again determined the plans, and I'm on my way to Jackson, Wyoming instead of a party in Stevensville, Mt. with many outdoorsy types. And you know how I like outdoorsy types...

I stopped at a tourism booth off of I-90 in South Dakota. I was hoping to find a campground that had no miniature golf, pools and screaming kids. Paging through a 50 page Black Hills book of places and things to do, a 1/4 page ad "Wild Horse Sanctuary" caught my eye. I called, they said come on down and 185 miles later, 10 of them on a dirt road, I was there.

"There" is a place I could stay forever. 11,000 acres of river, valley, canyons, sage, juniper, wildflowers and 300 wild horses. 300 wild horses. Free to roam. It was incredible. The man who put this all together, Dayton O. Hyde, took me for a private tour. He showed me the horses, the Indian artifacts, the sprawling, open land. He's raised \$750,000, and needs \$250,000 more to ensure it all stays intact, so he's just opened it to the public. He talked about me working there and helping his dream become a reality. I barely slept that night. How could I have found what felt like the right place so soon. I've only been on the road for 3 weeks, I'm not a winter person, but oh, those Black Hills are something special. And those horses... I woke the next morning in a trailer surrounded by longhorn cattle. Spotted/mottled moms and calves, playing and bellowing and drinking and eating, right outside my door. I rode out with 2 young blonde woman and we ran the sage, and watched the horses. I asked them about Dayton and they hesitantly told me things I didn't want to hear, but had known somewhere inside. Mr. Dayton O. Hyde, author, conservationist, 70ish, savior of wild horses, also collected women. I wanted a business relationship, he would want more. I left after my ride that day, with barely a good-bye to Dayton. Depressed for the first time on the trip, because my romantic notions had been outweighing my practical ones, I'd already been imagining myself on that ranch, saving those horses and making a difference.

MUNDANE THINGS

I just spent the better part of a beautiful Jackson Hole day trying to figure out bills. Everything is a mess. My deductible was more than I ever thought, checks are bouncing, a tenant who's been there less than 6 months is moving, truck broke down 3 times in 3 weeks, Slim has been to the vet twice, my camera broke the first day out, I've seen 3

trailer/campers overturned on the side of the road, I have been bit by 3 million mosquitoes and I'm having a great time!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

FYI: I can't continue to send 88 letters separately. Envelopes, printing and stamps get a bit steep. So I've sent this letter to about a 1/3 of the group. Enclosed with each letter are addresses to forward the letter to once you've read it. Just resend to next address etc. etc. Many hugs and kisses to all who have made me feel so warm and fuzzy inside. I am one lucky gal.

Chapter Three

Started & Ended 8/11/93

I'm in my sister's 2BR, 1st floor apartment in Lodi, CA. I'm eating guacamole, salsa, chips and drinking a beer. I've vacuumed, done laundry and read 2 newspapers. It's noon. I've just rented Glengarry Glen Ross and I'm bored. Board stiff. Bored to death. Borrrrrrrred silly.

WHERE I'VE BEEN

Since I last wrote, I've traveled from Jackson, Wyoming to Big Piney, Wyoming. I spent a blissful week in Big Piney, in a log cabin hiking daily with Slim and Freedog and Angie and Bags and Dani, and their human counterparts, Bill and Tine. I read and wrote and ate and watched the Atlanta Braves every night. I even, if I do say so myself, saved Freedog from death (a wee bit of exaggeration) when he slipped between two boulders and couldn't get out.

FREEDOG—an aside

It was another endless, blue and bright southwestern Wyoming summer day.

Our hike today was in the Big Piney ridges. Me and my dark brindle greyhound, Slim, and Bill with Freedog, his Bouvier and Irish Setter mix, who I called Mookie, because of his shaggy locks and large overshaped body.

We were hiking a dirt road, used by 4-wheel vehicles, but the dogs made their own path cutting back and forth through fragrant sagebrush and prickly cacti. Slim was the first dog to disappear. Freedog had flushed a buck antelope, and Slim never having seen one, took chase over 2 ridges. For 15 minutes, I played it cool, and continued to hike with Bill, assuming Slim would find his way back. But then visions of a greyhound still chasing an antelope entered my brain, and I set off over the ridges I'd seen him gallop over. I found him, on the second ridge, head down and panting, but none the worse for the chase.

We rejoined Bill and Freedog on the top of another ridge, where we had panoramic views of the entire countryside. Valleys of green grass, dotted with trees and sagebrush; mountains capped with snow as the backdrop, and ridges of red stone and sandstone. Freedog took that opportunity to head down a gravelly, steep ridge in search of gophers. Bill was unconcerned, feeling that Freedog would reappear. A half an hour passed and he hadn't returned. Bill felt we would see him on the way back, or he'd meet us at the truck, so we retraced our steps. We reached the truck, but Freedog was not there. Anger mixed with anxiety, as we climbed into Bill's 4-Runner and four-wheeled the area. I was hanging out the window yelling Free's name, and Bill was leaning on the horn. But we got no response. We decided I'd stay on that ridge, and Bill would drive towards home, checking the road and getting help from his wife, Tine.

Bill returned without having sighted Freedog. I was hoarse from yelling his name for the past half hour. We were both now feeling frantic. It'd been well over an hour since we'd last seen Freedog, and the terrain where we'd last seen him was treacherous. Additionally, Freedog had limited mobility as he had hip dysplasia in his hind legs.

We decided to go back to the top of the ridge where we'd last seen Free, while Tine went to neighboring ranches. Bill took one direction with the ridges. I took the other. These ridges were composed of loose rock, gravel and sediment. I had to plant my feet carefully and completely as I traversed my way down the ridge. The sediment was so loose, that a rock slide could happen easily. The big rocks that protruded halfway down the ridge were not made of rock, but of sand. At one point I'd been trusting a piece of the rock to hold my weight and it just disintegrated under my hiking boot.

I made my way carefully to the outcropping of the first group of rocks, still yelling his name, and tentatively looking for a big black dog carcass below, and fervently hoping not to see one. The rock, gravel and sand continued to move whenever I did, so I didn't see how Free would have survived a rockslide. Thankfully, he was not there, so I turned to look back at what was behind me. And there he was - a big furry black head staring at me from between two rocks. But right below him was a sheer drop of over forty feet. He hadn't made a sound the whole time I'd been yelling his name. I yelled at him to stay, and it didn't look like from below he had any choice, as I looked for a way to get up to him.

My mind clicked into emergency mode. Options filtered through my brain, and I as quickly eliminated or pursued them. I didn't have time to waste, if he moved forward he was dead.

I surveyed the rocks, but all the rocks around him were sheer. No foot or toeholds. I had to move 30 feet away from him to find a spot that would let me scramble back up, the whole time, yelling at Free to stay, and praying under my breath he'd listen - which wasn't one of his better traits. I came across the rocks to look down at him and view his predicament. His two hind legs were wedged tightly between two sheer boulders. In front of him was that drop of over forty feet. Behind him was a sage brush growing out of the boulders. It looked like he'd lost his footing on these rocks and slipped into the crack.

I gingerly made my way so I was right above him. I couldn't initially tell if his back legs were broken, as they were wedged in such a tight space, I couldn't see them. In order to get close to him, I had to straddle the two rocks above him, aware from my earlier lesson that these rocks weren't as solid as they looked. And so now, both Free and I were looking at the precipice and his dilemma was mine.

I had a 6 ft nylon leash wrapped around my waist that I pulled off and thought that if I fashioned a noose with it and slipped it over him at least I've have some leverage should he start to fall. I got it over his neck, but couldn't get close enough to get it over his legs and he certainly wasn't going to lift his front legs willingly, as they were the only thing stopping him from falling down the precipice. I knew that my position was too precarious to pull him up with the leash just around his neck. He weighed over 80 lbs, I still wasn't sure about the damage to his back legs, and the sheer rock I was on didn't provide much leverage. I yelled

and yelled for Bill, and he finally heard me. He stood about 100 feet above us on the top of the ridge and I screamed that we needed more rope. He left to go back to the truck.

At this point, I was getting worried that Free might try to do something to get out, and I wouldn't have him securely enough to save him. So I took a deep breath, told myself I can do anything I put my mind to, and inched down closer to him. I leaned my body over the precipice to pull up his front paws and get the leash noose around his body. One false move by either of us and we would be history. But we did it. I had a hold on him.

I readjusted my position again and pulled back the sage as much as I could and saw that while his back feet were stuck in a two inch space, they didn't seem to be broken.

Though Bill had gone to get more rope, I didn't think he'd be able to provide much more assistance as there wasn't any room to maneuver even after he came down. Additionally, Free had been trapped there for over an hour, and I just thought that he and I had to do this. Now.

I thought that if I could get him turned back towards me and away from facing the cliff, and if he could use his legs on the sage to help me while I pulled, then maybe we could do it. With a deep breath, I said a prayer to the goddess that saves dogs and heaved. Freedog scrambled on the rock and sage, I kept full contact around his body as I scrambled on the rock and sand, and we did it. He was free.

And in typical Freedog fashion, was off an running with my leash wrapped around his body. This adventure completed and forgotten, he was already back to what he'd been doing before - hunting for gophers. I was wondering on my butt, breathing hard, and wondering if I could sell this story to Walt Disney.

back to the story....

I didn't want to leave, but I thought I needed to get to my sister for her 32nd birthday on August 1. So I traveled across Nevada and half of California. I left the trailer in Big Piney. I was just tired of hauling it, and I'll be heading north from here into mountains and it's just no fun to drive with it. Of course the truck is still up to its breakdown tricks. New front brakes needed in Wyoming, because someone didn't put a bolt back in the drums. Oil change needed, a complete flushing, again, of the engine coolant. The list continues. This certainly is not making me a fan of American cars/trucks.

WHERE I'M HEADED

Mid-August I'm headed to Northern California to check it out. Eureka's on the coast and Redding's in the interior. In Oregon, I'm going to look at towns called Sisters and Bend. In Idaho, maybe Coeur D'Alene, though someone told me it's where the White Supremist nation started, and a manager that works for my sister got a knife pulled on him by a 17 year old member of the Aryan nation, so... that's just a maybe. And I'll finally get to Montana to see friends in Florence and Whitefish. Then it's back to Wyoming to pick up the trailer and head to Utah, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona.

MY DAYS

I'm heavy into A&W rootbeer floats these past two weeks. I started with small floats, but I've now graduated to large. I'm happy they don't have a jumbo size.

I've wanted to golf. I shot a 101 the other day. My normal score is around 110-120, so I was pretty excited. Next time out though, it was a 122. Boo hoo. But I'm not giving up. Unfortunately, Susan has to work too much and too late, and I'm too chicken to play golf by myself.

Today I was driving to the post office in Lodi, and was waiting to make a left turn. The light changed from red to blinking yellow, and coming straight at me was a train. A big, black, moving choo choo. It was tooting horn and flashing lights. I had to back up into the lane next to me because no one was allowing me to turn, and going forward seemed foolhardy.

Sunday, the people my sister works with had a party on an island. I was pretty excited. Outdoors, on an island, in the sun and Slim could come and stretch his legs. This island is in the middle of their delta. A delta, my sister tells me, is created from levies. We brought steaks and ribs and chicken and strawberry shortcake. As the boat pulled up to the makeshift dock, my jaw dropped. This island had no beach and no land to explore. It was 50 feet of high grass with a platform, and you could only walk on the platform. Slim got off his first boat, leaned off the dock and tried to walk on water. He'd mistaken the green slime on top of the water for grass. He did a straight nose dive and came up sputtering and swimming, with no beaches or low land for him to get a hold of to get out. He swam to me on the platform, people held my belt and we heaved him up. He lay on my lap for about 30 seconds without moving.

MISC THOUGHTS

Just started Isable Allende's "The House of Spirits". It starts with this poem:

How much does a man live, after all?
Does he live a thousand days, or one only?
For a week, or for several centuries?
How long does a man spend dying?
What does it mean to say "for ever"?

—Pablo Neruda

A pure real book - *Animal Dreams*, by Barbara Kingsolver, had this passage:

The very least you can do in your life is to figure out what you can hope for. And the most you can do is live inside that hope. Not admire it from a distance, but live right in it, under its roof.

Hallie

Chapter Four

September 10, 1993

Hello there...This may be the last letter for a while, as I've exhausted all my friends in the top half of the country, and I won't have a base from which to write continually. I am now truly on my own and on the road.

THE BAD NEWS

I debated about writing this depressing stuff, but depressing stuff is what I'm dealing with, and it's causing me more nightmares and tears than I'd like. The real world keeps trying to close in, as my medical got canceled (and then reinstated), my good tenant moved out (and no replacement has yet been found), the truck front brakes went, the idler needed replacing, I was told my tires were totally worn as they are car tires (4-ply) and not truck tires, and I found out that my portable CB, truck tool box and tapes had been stolen. Money issues are nasty, gross and upsetting. I keep repeating, "It's only money." But money allows me to do this, and without it, unfortunately, my dream doesn't happen. So it's got me down. But then I get a brochure from a horse racing school in Indiana, and I remember that I've always wanted to be a jockey, and here's my chance to learn. So I've written a letter to the owner, in hopes that I can barter work for classes, and life again looks good.

And then again, reality surfaces. And though I was positive that the owner of Hawkeye Racing School would absolutely want me to work for her, the reality is that her situation can't handle it right now, and I'm to call her back in November. This added to the bad dreams, as I had, in typical Claudia fashion, pinned all my hopes on working for her the next few months. I would like something concrete for a few months, particularly something where I was learning, and not spending much money. The traveling is starting to feel aimless and without focus, and the money issues just get more pressing. But this too will pass, after a few more good walks around Tine's property and a few more good noisy cries.

WHERE I'VE BEEN

I left my sister in Lodi, CA and headed north. The coast of California and Oregon are awesome, but out of my price range, so I headed into the interior of Oregon. The truck did not like the interior of Oregon, as we headed down a mountainous 20 mile road, only to lose our brakes with about 5 miles to go. Again, nice people told me to let the brakes cool, and I'd be able to get to Grants Pass. At Grants Pass, I went to a brake shop, where I met Pam. She was also waiting for her car. We got to talking, and I got an invite to dinner. She and her husband, Andy, were Saudi Arabia, Florida, Kansas transplants. Andy had just started his new job, and we talked of travel and the need to get every single thing you can out of every single moment, as they had lost an 18 year old son, two years ago, and they wear their pain constantly.

From their house, I breezed through Sisters, Brothers, Madras, Prineville, and Redmond. Chamber of Commerce's became my one stop in Oregon, full of friendly people and info on

anything you could want to know about a town - temperature highs, lows, averages; biggest employers; age range of population etc. I liked Oregon, but it did not pull me the way Montana pulls me. Mt. is just so big and open and raw. Elloie, a Montana friend, has 5 acres, 6 horses, a man that loves her, her artwork and her sister who moved to the next town. It sounds pretty nigh purrfect to me. We did a lot of margarita drinking, horseback riding, and flower growing watching. Slim learned to follow horses, albeit a bit too closely. Penny, another MT friend, has a garden, apple trees, free downhill ski passes, a ski boat and a man that loves her and makes a mean apple pie. We spent a fun night, in the pouring rain, at a micro-brewery tour. You pay \$15 for a mug, and get to sample about 20 beers from small breweries. I was told I was rubber-necking, as there were SOooooo many cute, fit guys in one place, my neck just kept swiveling.

From Montana, I stopped for a redux at the Burklands in Jackson, Wyoming. Slim and I spent our days on 3-7 mile hikes in a countryside that made me stretch out my arms and whoop and sing with joy. I'd be huffing and puffing up some hill, only to reach the top and have a vista of aspens and meadow and wildflower spread before me, with the snow-capped mountains as a backdrop. Pretty damn spectacular. Then nights would be spent in the hot tub, under a full moon and more stars than sky.

And I'm now back in Big Piney, Wyoming another piece of paradise on earth. Tine has been throwing dinner parties, and I've been a willing guest, eating lots of good food, listening to good conversation and doing a pretty mean clean-up patrol. Today we saddled her two very fat, did I say VERY FAT, Icelandic ponies, Heinrich and Sterner, and rode them through newly mowed hay fields. They had not been ridden all year, but didn't buck us off.

WHERE I'M HEADED

From Wyoming, I'm planning on scoping out Cedar City, Utah, and then Flagstaff, Sedona and towns around Tucson, Arizona. From there, it'll be New Mexico.

WHAT I WANT

I figure it is about time I started to write down what I'm looking for. I'm approaching it two ways. One will be a list, and the other will be random feelings. Here's a taste of both.

HORSES - I've been around horses this part of the trip, and I have never felt so free and open and exhilarated as when cantering an open field, or a wooded forest. If Hawkeye doesn't come through this year, I'll be checking out other equestrian centers, and seeing if I can learn a lot about horse care, with a minimum of time and money. And one day, soon, I'll have my horses.

LOVE - Would I like a passionate loving relationship? Absolutely! And I know there are some out there, because I've seen it. But I've also been the recipient of open hearts and homes as I've trucked through friend's homesteads on my journey. Friends are key to my well-being.

LAND - I love walking where there is no one, I love gazing at vistas undisturbed by phone lines and houses, I love the land. So I have to be someplace where I can afford land.

DOGS - Slim has been an excellent companion, though he still really does prefer men to women. I keep telling him to find one for me! But he's not very discriminating. But he also loves to tour around, and walk the country and just be. I will have many more greyhounds in my new life when I stop traveling and start my Greyhound Gang.

WARMTH - I don't like icky weather. I don't like monotonous weather. I like warm weather better than cold, because I don't like to wear tons of clothes. I like shorts and shirts and untied sneaks without socks. I'm finding I don't need to wear something different everyday, or wear earrings. I need a lot of good books, and a lot of people and animal companionship. And I still don't know what I want to be when I grow up.

VEHICLE - I will not own a Chevy pick-up truck in my new life. I currently have a for sale sign in this one.

THOUGHTS

What are possessions? The measure of a man or woman? I had a house, a convertible, a 35 mm camera, an antique brass bed, 40 pairs of shoes, a Chanel suit, a corporate title and business cards. I sold, gave away or chucked all those. My possessions are now a dream catcher, a rain maker, a non-obeying greyhound named Slim, a neighing stick horse, Blackie, and my books.

I am free, light and whole. I'm defining myself by the quality of each day, and the people I meet and know, versus the quality of costly inanimate objects that consumed my prior life.

I'm searching for a place. Where I can put down roots and acquire real quality things. A sunset, the smell of sage, a running horse, a sleeping dog. Timeless and pure moments, so often missed in the pursuit of life.

I'm pushing my limits and expanding my boundaries. I became a mountaineer when I saved a dog stuck in a crevice, with a 25 foot drop in front of him. I'm trying to not feel guilty about not having a job, after having had one for 24 years. I'm trying to manage the fears that rear without a weekly income. I wake up every morning, and I say, "What do you want to happen today?" And with that wish comes all sorts of wondrous happenings. A golden eagle flies in front of the truck, a fox paces the road next to it, Slim comes when I call, and the truck doesn't break down one day.

What is the WHY of this? My astrologer says that this is a make or break year for me to change the pattern of my life. My mother says, "You'll never grow up." My tarot reader says it will be a very spiritual and creative journey for me. My friends tell me that I've been talking about it forever, and to just do it! They want me to write to them, to live vicariously through my writings. To be me for a day. And they say to me, "Aren't you scared? You're traveling alone, around the country. You've left it all behind, the daughter, the friend, the

corporate manager, the homeowner. What will you do if you're robbed, raped, broken down, hungry, lonely?"

But these scenarios don't even enter into my mind. They're not what I fear. They're not as risky or scary as my attempts and audacity in putting pen to paper and saying, "I've got something to say that you'll find interesting, read on."

I'm not a writer. I'm a person who's been reading since she was 4. I got more stars than anyone, year after year, on the public library reading cards. *The Black Stallion, Born Free, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, Big Red*. I devour written words. But write them?

I can edit. I can take a piece of writing and suggest ways to make it clearer, more succinct, more powerful for the reader. I have an intuitive sense of what feels and sounds right. But those are ordinary skills. That's fixing, not creating. Not the real stuff of emotions and adjectives and evocations of life.

How can I write when I don't know WHY? Is it the grass always greener? I envy my friends their homes and husbands. They have someone to kiss and hold and share with every night of their lives. They have a defined role - husband/wife/mother/father. I'm 40, single, childless and jobless. I'm 40, free and free and free. I'm a one million piece jigsaw puzzle, waiting for pieces to fall into place. Can I complete my jigsaw puzzle, if I'm not sure what the picture looks like? And if the pieces to complete the picture are scattered? Scattered in memories, daily actions, books read, and dreams remembered. I'm searching. Searching for those pieces, that significant click of puzzle piece finding puzzle piece, becoming whole. I want to have a clear purpose, a reason for being here. Attempting to define self, when previously self has been defined by what I did, what I drove, what I wore and how much I made.

And I'm searching-for something subtle and something that clubs me over the head. Something private and grand. Clean and free. Warm and enveloping. Womb-like. Home.

And everyone I know is rooting for me, because I'm doing what they think they want to do. Start anew, start over, just start in some cases. And I think I'd change places with them gladly. This burning knot in the pit of my stomach aches and smolders. It wants love and protection and caring and honesty. It wants sage brush, and horses, and dogs. It wants work that gives back to the land, to the people and ultimately to self.

And I'm on the road, asphalt massing under and through me. I've got the dream catcher, the rainmaker and my dog. I watch the exits roll by. To me, they're just miles I'm clicking off on the speedometer. To others, they're a destination reached, home.

Chapter Five

Started 10/1 Ended 10/22/93

It's 5 a.m. I've got insomnia again. Finished a book - On the Sargasso Sea. Tried to count sheep. Tried to get my brain to stop. It's a different insomnia than I used to have back East. That insomnia would intrude, was rude. It was insistent and pushy. I'd wake up and be grouchy. This insomnia is more gentle. Almost like waves of thoughts washing through me. This place has depths and levels I've yet to plummet. The opportunity to do something that helps to rebalance a small piece of the world exists here. I, of course, want to get it all done now. Plan the plan, affect the dream, move it forward, make it work. And it's all for something that makes a difference. Angel Canyon, where Best Friends Animal Sanctuary resides, was a place where the Anasazi (the first Indians) shamans over 1000 years ago would go to meditate, to commune. There's three concentric circles on one of the rock walls here. It marks the place where you can cross over to other worlds. I've crossed.

Switching now from mystic to cleric. Here's some real world thoughts. I'm set. I'm settled. At least for the winter. In my getting smaller by the day trailer. You can call me during the days (2 hour time difference) - 801-644-5662 or 801-644-2001. Or better yet, write. I really appreciate mail. me. c/o Best Friends Box G Kanab, UT 84741. I also travel. So if you've got plans that take you to Vegas, Salt Lake, Phoenix - they're all within my range!

Here's a copy of the magazine that I'm doing some writing for. Each month, I do more. This month Cindi and me, was totally rewritten by me, from an article Pam Sleeper sent in. I wrote the blurbs under It's a Dog's Life. (They put in that gooney picture of me and my hand against my wishes. Of course Slim looks good) I helped with the Wish List. I wrote the copy for the products. (they are very cool!) And they made me do Doctrine of Kindness on the Animals and Religion page because I'm so unreligious. Nice guys...

HOW I GOT HERE

When I last wrote, I was lamenting that I'd exhausted most of my friends in the top half of the US and was now on my own. Looking for home. So I was meandering through Utah, with Arizona as my destination, and was checking out the south western corner - St. George, Hurricane, Gunlock, Cedar City. I liked it a lot. But it was already pretty built up, and land was expensive, if you could even find any. There was a parade through town with all the Mormon beauties and I decided to move on. I moved on through Kanab. I stopped at their Chamber of Commerce and got the demographics. 3000 people. Tourist town. Close to Grand Canyon, Bryce, Zion, Lake Powell. Then I went to a real estate office to get some idea about land prices. I was really just going through the motions, as the town was not as quaint as I was looking for. At the real estate office, a woman approaches me and Slim. She was oohing and ahing over him. And asked me if I was going to the animal sanctuary up the road. I said, "What animal sanctuary?" In a flurry, she ran out, and ran back in with literature from a nearby store. I went to visit and see their greyhounds. And haven't left.

Some impressions:

Kanab - Mormons and Motels. Restaurants and Rest Stops. "The Greatest Earth on Show" - the town sign. 3000 people and one street light in town. Everywhere on the horizon big red rocks jutting into big blue sky. A Laundromat, where on Sundays, people from Connecticut come to do their wash.

Campground - Fronted by the Moonshadow, one of two establishments in Kanab that serve liquor. Backed by a red sand road that leads to a King Kong like red rock towering over you. Home for me.

Trailer - Finally using it...almost...like it's meant to be used. I even lit the gas for hot water, and thought I was going to die, as a big blast and pouf flew in my face. I survived to write again though. I still don't understand the poop process. Where it goes, how it goes and what I'm supposed to do to make sure it doesn't go backwards into my ittsy bittsy teensy weensy bathroom. I cannot gain weight because I would be unable to turn around in the shower. I have a cupboard of pots and pans, and have yet, in 5 months to use one of them.

I add an addendum to that last statement. It poured rain for about 24 hours, and my trailer started to leak in 3 places. So I used my pans to catch the water. I also climbed up on top of the trailer, laid new roof tar stuff around the skylights, and got back down safely. The guy at the hardware store, probably on purpose, did not tell me you needed kerosene to remove the tar from your hands, and I did not read the directions to the part that told you needed kerosene to remove the tar from your hands. So I had to walk a mile, with very black hands, to the nearest gas station to get something to get the tar off.

Parents - Got to see my parents for a few hours, while they were on a bus tour in Zion. Seeing them for so short a time, after so long a time, made me very conscious of how much my existence and being are tied to them. They hold many pieces to the puzzle. And, I, of course, played the daughter and asked them to do many favors for me when they got home. Like send me warm clothes, because it's 5000 elevation, and there is a winter here.

Land - The West is trying to be the East. I go into a real estate office and ask about land, and they think I'm talking about an acre. They are building developments out here, and those are the prestigious places to live! It appears that land is owned by the government or families that have been here forever. And if any land opens up, it is sold in small parcels to get more money. Also, water is owned by the state. You have to buy water rights. And since somebody else already owns them, you pay dearly.

Love - I went to Sleepless in Seattle tonight. I see why my friends told me not to go. It is such a perfectly perfect, freewheeling funny movie about fantasies becoming realities. And what have I been telling you guys. It can happen. And there's this whole part of me (us) that wants and watches and waits for my (our) fantasies, particularly about the opposite sex, to happen. And

the rational beings in us are always trying to tell us it doesn't go like that. And a new friend here, just lent me this book called WE, written by a Jungian therapist, that analyzes and explains the whole thing about romantic love, and what a bogus thing it is, and how it ruins what could be good and real when you really know, care and respect another. But I (we) (Westerners - Europeans and us) go on saying I don't care - I need that romantic ideal, that tingle, that something undecipherable. I could tear myself apart for the desire of it. And I do.

Weddings - I've been here 3 weeks and I've been to two weddings, and someone else I met here has decided she's in love and who knows? One wedding was of two displaced Connecticutites. They got married on their land (no house yet), by a gunslinger who's also a postman and a minister. Bud, a golden eagle, was a witness to their marriage, as were their parents and children. Porto potties and dutch ovens complete the picture. They are two of the happiest people I've met, and my new bestest friends in Kanab. Our weekly ritual is washing red rock sand off of our clothes every Sunday morning in the Laundromat.

Then there was the Best Friends' wedding at a place called Angel's Landing. A surreal serene outcropping from the red rock, with natural ponds nestled under rocks, and soft green grass. One of the ponds has crawfish in it. And the view of the canyon and surrounding rocks juxtaposes with the magical secrets of the place.

Signs - A passing rainstorm resulted in the biggest, bestest rainbow I've ever seen. From end to end, lime green, papal purple, lipstick pink, sky blue, lemon yellow buffeted against the clouds and red rock.

A sky covering sunset in pastel pinks and purples had my complete attention as I was headed home (to the trailer) on a red sand road. I was so focused on it, I almost hit a herd of gray deer that had crossed the road in front of my truck. I sat there in the middle of them, as they stared at me and I stared at them. They flew off when Slim barked his greeting to them. While this was all happening, in the space of less than a minute, the song, "There's a Place For Us" was wailing from my radio.

A week after I'd been volunteering, a woman left Best Friends' employ, which opened up a spot for me.

Slim - I battle with Slim every night about getting in the truck. Because he has the run of the land where Best Friends office is, and greets everyone with his infamous smile, he doesn't want to leave. He lays out on the deck, on his dog bed, and every hour comes inside to ask me if we're going for a hike yet, or for a ride. When I have to do an errand, he follows me down the road a ways, but still refuses to go with me, and then, according to the staff, whines and acts like he misses me, until I return. Where he then goes into his, "I missed you so much, how could you leave me" routine. I find it all very charming. He is my bestest dog. And I tell him that at least 10 times a day. I do wish though his bones were not so boney when he tries to curl up next to my sleeping bag. And I do wish he'd stop eating the horse manure and other assorted ground droppings.

My day - I get up sometime after 7. Shower. Dress. Watch Slim do his thing and then get in the truck and hope it starts. My usual attire is shorts, and lately a sweatshirt over a T-shirt, as the mornings are getting colder. Sneakers, socks and of course, earrings complete the outfit. At work, we recount a dream or two. And laugh. During the day, I switch desks and computers about 7 times. I'm the roving worker, currently. Work is varied. Writing articles, booklets. Analyzing flows of data and processes. Working on tactical/strategical plans. Licking stamps and envelopes. Stuffing bills and renewal notices. Talking to people who wander in. Going on adoption runs to Vegas. Talking to Slim, who stops by at least every hour to see if we're going to play. I try to take a short hike every day. And I'm riding 2-3 times a week. I do this 7 days a week. Happy.

Winter - I hear different things from everyone. "Only 2 months long, sunny and not that much snow." "You need 4-wheel drive (of course my stupid truck is only 2 wheel), the cold is unbelievable, the slush goes on forever, there can be days without the sun..." so who knows? But my parents sent me more sweatshirts and sweat pants and jackets than I could ever use, so I should be OK until I get home for the holidays. Lesson here - Never say never. I do remember saying I was going to be warm and toasty in New Mexico and Arizona this winter.

Home for the Holidays - I'm flying in from Salt Lake City, and leaving Slim with Tine and Bill in Big Piney, Wyoming. I was going to drive a Geo Metro home for the holiday, so I could take Slim, but everyone convinced me that that was a really stupid idea. So Tine and Bill saved the day and said they would love to have Slim. Oh, the dates - mark your calendars - DEC 20 -29th. Can't wait!

Belated Happy Birthday to all I forgot. I didn't mean to!

Keep your good thoughts coming my way. They're helping to make this happen for me.

Chapter Six

Started March 22, 1994

The opening to my first chapter... "Cheshire Puss," she (Alice) began... "would you please tell me which way I ought to go from here?"

"That depends on where you want to get to," said the cat.

And I wasn't sure where I wanted to get to, so I wasn't sure where I was going to end up. But "sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast," (Alice's Adventures in Wonderland) and they just might as well be Claudia's Adventures in the US, 'cause all those impossible things aren't.

Redux

Boy, have I missed you guys! This was all about taking life at a more leisurely pace, but maybe I just have to come to terms with "I don't do leisurely!" I feel like I'm a top, spinning here, bouncing off to there, and whirling off to somewhere else. And last year this time I'd left my job, and my truck's got 10,000 more miles, and I was home for Christmas, and it's March and I'm 41. And I've been in Kanab, Utah for over 5 months, and it only gets better.

Playing At Working

And better. I'm still not making ends meet, but it seldom gets in my way. I'm certainly working enough. First, I'm a realtor. Took 90 hours of classes, (so did Slim - I snuck him into the back of class one day, and the instructor didn't even notice until break time), and we passed the test in February. Sold one lot so far for \$17,000. A lot to learn, and not a whole lot of money to be had because the average price of a sale down here is \$50,000. you get 1/2 of a 1/2 of 6%. But is it fun! I talk to lots of new people, and get to go into people's houses. Of course, I'll be keeping my eye out for my land. What better vantage point. So if you want to invest - this place is going to boom. There are people from California coming in every day, just scooping up land. There's this adorable "Sears Roebuck" house. Yup, bought in 1912 from a Sears catalog for \$648.15. It included paint and a china cupboard. It's a gingerbread victorian, and is only \$59,900.

And there's my real paying job - it's all about rubber stamps. Rubber stamps that are kind of like tupperware. You see, you invite your friends over, and a woman comes into your home, and you learn how to make greeting cards, and lots of other cute things with rubber stamps - and there are many, many very cool techniques - the simplest (and most boring) is using a stamp pad. And then these women buy more stamps and accessories, and then they show all their friends - and then - well you get the picture. Anyway this company was started 5 years ago by 2 sisters (with 4 girls each) and they are currently a 2 million dollar business and plan to double this year! So I showed up flashing my flashy resume - and they hired me. And we're still figuring out what I'll do. Currently my title is Sanity Saver. And they are the most fun, and we laugh a

lot, and I'm easing my way into their lives, and they into mine, (I'm babysitting for 4 of the girls on Thursday night) and this could really be something super. I mean it's pretty super right now, but it could be something very full-time that actually uses my old business skills, and might earn me a living (that's more than \$15,000 a year out here!) But I'm currently balking about working more than 20 hours a week, 'cause I'd then have to be in an office - and i've really had enough of that.

So I'm a pretty happy camper. Two jobs that have lots of potential, and are fun. Oh, I forgot, I have a third job. I'm also working with two video guys and helping them film travel vignettes for this area. Coral Pink Sand Dunes is where I want to make love (should I ever again). Long, undulating dunes of the tiniest granuales of sand. It runs over your body minutely caressing and arousing. And I placed my body at the top of a dune, and spun over and over dizzy and breathless at the bottom.

Oh, I almost forgot, Job number 4 as a freelance writer. I've sent off a few articles to magazines, and just yesterday got my first acceptance. So you must keep an eye on Trailer Life magazine, my article "Me and My Trailer" should be appearing soon.

New Home

But enough of jobs. I've found an apartment. It's off of an airplane hanger which is on the property of a real adobe house on 36 acres. Surrounded by acres of BLM (government) land. It's slightly bigger than the trailer - a bedroom/living room combo, kitchen and shower/toilet closet. The best part - I'm able to hang up some clothes, take a long hot shower, and even sleep in sheets. My trailer has taken it's last trip behind the truck, and it rolled and bobbed behind me, creaking and protesting to settle outside my new home. I'm inside it now. It is my creative place. I'm home there. I don't think I will ever sell it. And if you come to visit you can experience some of my journey, by staying in my trailer. flights to Las Vegas are cheap. And I'm only 3 1/2 hours from there! And you can see Zion, and Bryce and I know a secret way to the north rim of the Grand Canyon, where there's a no fences, no people and a 3000 foot drop.

I'm now taking a hot shower that lasts long enough for me to wash, body and hair and shave my legs. I have bookends to put my books between. I have a full length closet (already full). I've bought plants to bring the outdoors in. I've planted grass to walk barefoot in. An immature golden eagle lives around me. Slim has over 36 acres to roam in, and he comes when I call. And I'm writing this while listening to James Taylor sing, "you've Got A Friend".

Freedom. And it's so much more than just another word for nothing left to lose. It's a word that means I decide when I wake up. How long I'll read before I go to bed. What I'll do today. What each minute means. The freedom to be exactly who I want to be, to imagine and create situations where every choice smiles.

I met Seline when she was walking her dog Goldie, and she said to me,

"I just want to do that parasailing thing before I die. It'll be just like a bird, don't you think?"
Seline is in her 70's.

And there's the woman who runs a local Chamber of Commerce, and who proudly gave me a tour of her new Ford Taurus. And showed me her highlighted map of places visited. Four thousand miles in 2 months. To come and go where she wants, when she wants. Her map of her yellow brick road trip to Oz and beyond. She's in her 60's.

Slim Update

Slim, potential major disaster turned into not such a big deal. He was hunkering after a cat in the bush, and came up with a huge howl and a pinky width and length size stick in his eye. No eye showing, just this stick sticking out. I instinctively pulled, and out it came, and with my hand cupped over his eye, I tried to call vets. But it was 7 pm, and I had to drive 1 1/2 hours to the nearest available vet. I was sure the stick had gone into his brain, or into his eye. When we got there, Slim was standing up and looking out of both eyes, and it appears the membrane around the eye parted for the stick, and all he got was a scratched cornea, and it should heal OK. Luckily I'd brought the stick with me, so when the cop stopped me, I whipped out the stick and he waved me on!

Food, Glorious Food

My newest treat to eat is a vegetarian sandwich. It nicely supplements my other stables which include salad, cheese and crackers, Crispix cereal, toast and nachos.

You take a really neat-grained bread and lightly toast it. Then you put sliced cheese (I like jalapeno jack) on one side of the bread and put it back into the toaster oven to melt slightly from the heat of the oven. Then you add sprouts, cucumbers, tomatoes (the basics) and then depending on what's in the fridge you can use avocado, onions, scallions, red cabbage etc. I put only real Hellman's mayo on one side, and I just discovered this, a dollop of Italian dressing - I'm very partial to Bernstiens - and voila - one of the best sandwiches you've ever had. I've had that for about 5 days each week for the past 3 weeks.

Oh, I forgot to update you on my last job at Best Friends Animal Sanctuary. They fired me because "They only wanted people working for them with positive attitudes and sunny dispositions." So do you think it was my evil twin that was working for them for over 4 months? Silly people. They could have come up with something more believable to fire me for, like I was embezzling dogs or something. But I wouldn't have found Stampin'Up! if they hadn't fired me - so absolutely everything works out for the better! They are going through some major changes, from a religious organization to a non-profit one. Their Heart is in the right place, but they have some growing up to do. They ask my opinions, but then they don't like it when I give them. Oh well - it'll all work out.

I'm writing this instead of Cleaning - I just get no satisfaction from it. I want things clean, but I don't want to take the time to do it. I'd rather be hiking, or reading, or even working - but cleaning? The apartment I'm moving into has not been lived in for 2 years - so there is an accumulation of dirt in there. The worst is the accumulation of spiders. YUK! I'll pick up snakes, I'll sleep with just about any animal - but spiders. YUK! When I was little I had a recurring nightmare about spiders hanging from the ceiling and asking me to marry them. "Marry me, Marry me" they were all chorusing in high squeaky voices. I started crying so loud, my dad came in and woke me up out of the nightmare. I told him that I didn't want to marry any of them, and he said I didn't have to.

So today I bombed the place, and vacuumed them all up.

No there's been no men in my life.

"Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, will you join the dance?" (*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*)

Chapter Seven

September 21, 1994

Well, hello! Long time no write. Here's why. 'Cause I'm back in the rat race. At least as much of a rat race as they have in Kanab, UT. Which probably makes it more of a mice race than a rat race. But I decided I needed to make some money. And I actually have a job out here I like, and that has a lot of potential, and the people are fun to work with, and they are paying me a decent hourly wage (for out here), so I've been working for a living. And so, not having as much fun as I was last year. AHhhhhhh, money. Or as Pablo said, "I'd like to live like a poor man with lots of money." Or Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Money cost too much."

So I'm working full-time at STAMPIN' UP!, and they want to make me office manager. I'd rather not. They're just looking for someone to be around day in and day out, and I did that way back when. So we'll just wait and see what they really want. I'm sort of out of real estate, though I'd like to dabble in it. I didn't like it. Still don't have a handle on why not, but something to do with people treating you like dodo, and wheeling and dealing going on that I had no clue, etc. etc.

And I'm moving forward with some dreams, modifying others - oh so adult of me. And no, there's been no men, and it's getting mighty lonely. I did make one error in men judgment recently, but I just kept repeating my mantra, "Yes, I am alive. I can feel sexual again. Someone was attracted to me, and I was attracted to him. Yes, Yes, I am alive." But I scared the hell out of him, (me too, actually) and never heard from him again. So it goes. On and on.

But my dream of starting a greyhound rescue organization is very near. I'm incorporated as a non-profit in Utah. I've sent in all my paperwork for tax-exempt status to the IRS, and next week I go to pick up 2 greyhounds in Tucson. To take into my home, train and adopt out. Greyhound Gang is official. Soon you'll get my pitch to donate money to me instead of Greenpeace and World Wildlife Fund.

Can't sleep. I want, want, want - what? what? what? someone to sleep with me. Something more in my life than making money - a living. A place with roots - that feels right.

What's right? When you're sitting in your place after a rainstorm, and rainbow unfolds to you.

When you're driving in your car and a retriever is running along side, matching you pace for pace with the pure joy of prairie grass and red sand flying.

When you meet a man, and his eyes light on you, and he reaches to inadvertently touch you, and your body electric responds.

When it's midnight and the stars blanket the sky and there's no longer a sky, only stars - glimmering with dreams and hopes and you watch them fall - all around you.

And you can't sleep at night 'cause it all whirls round and round, and the noise pounds at you, and you don't know where it'll land and who you're supposed to be.

And you watch video after video endless, numbless, a way to stop the noise, to watch the noise.

And nothing tastes good. And you crave nothing. But a touch. Human. Animal. A connection. A need. A desire.

September 30

Are you sitting down. I've done it. I've sold out. Not forever, mind you. Just for a little. The almighty dollars have hooked me in. I'm embarrassed. I'm depressed. I've been having a few too many drinks. (Ever try Cave Creek beer - it has a hot chili in it!). Anyhow, I'll be in Orlando, Florida for the next month or two or three...starting next week. Yes, starting next week.

Here I was traveling along this lovely road in Kanab, Utah. Had a job I liked, friends I liked, apartment I liked, even had a bid in on a home I liked, got the Greyhound Gang almost all set up, was drafting a letter to Oprah about why she should do a show on greyhounds - and out of nowhere I'm sideswiped by a call from (drum roll please) CORPORATE AMERICA. WE WANT YOU! Well since my affectionate life has been pretty nigh nonexistent, want from any quarter is mighty appealing - especially when it's followed up with big bucks!. So Slim and I are on a plane next week. In three weeks Time Warner is launching a shopping service similar (maybe) to Prodigy's in Orlando (their first test market) and they don't have a back-end support system in place. They got my name as the back-end expert (what does that mean?) and offered me more money than I'll have made all year. So who'd have thought! Gosh, I hope I remember all that stuff I did...

Speaking of stuff I did...Here's the fill in on all the stuff I've been doing since I wrote to you last April...wow it's been a long time...

I was this close to purchasing my dream property and home. Ten acres, adobe home, airplane hanger, renter's apartment, grape vine tree trunks for ceiling, terra cotta rock floors, backed up on BLM (government) land. Had a verbal commitment. Owner sold to someone else. I trusted her.

Had an apartment for three months (the apartment that was on the property that I was going to buy), and then had to move back into my trailer. Camped on some amazing land for two months. Coyotes serenaded me every night. Rabbits ate all my flowers. Slim and I made a friend of Golden Retriever Gonzo, who'd run 20 mph for over 2 miles next to my car on the red dirt road to work. Moon rises to moon over.

Real Estate not my thing. Too salesy. Working full time at stamp business. Lots of fun and good people. Variety. Challenge.

Sold two articles to DOGS USA. Should be out in January. *Trailer Life* article still hasn't appeared.

Bought new (used) car. Rodeo Isuzu. Black. Loaded. Cool. Sweet. Traded in truck. Cried. (I know, what a fool am I.)

Fell (hard) for unavailable man. Only for a weekend. Cried. (I know, what a fool am I)

Realized I needed more life and excitement than Kanab has to offer. Been to Vegas a few times, but am not much of a gambler with my hard earned money. At least there's lot of people to look at.

Moved into a very cute, high ceiling, spacious one bedroom apartment. Am acquiring things again. Like an antique mahogany bureau, old candy box, greyhound tapestry from Belgium. It feels nice to have a space to accumulate things in.

Greyhound Gang moving forward. Was all set to get two dogs from the track in Tucson. Will put on hold until I return. Working on brochure, manual, grants etc.

A View of Springtime

It's a May morning and I'm sitting out soaking up the rays in my too small Vittadini bikini that only appears when I'm alone surrounded by hundreds of acres of sage and juniper and crested wheat.

But I'm not alone because the birds are heavy into mating this Sunday. They're chasing each other all over my tin roof, clanging and banging. It's quite annoying. I mean, how about a little respect for the single, it's grown back again, I'm tired of sleeping with the dog, virgin below them. Their incessant chattering about the blue sky and the joy of being alive and the need to make whoopee is giving me a migraine.

So I go to water the flowers, and watch them spread their petals with thirst, and I pick up a pot to move it, and there's two earthworms wrapped tightly around each other.

So...Hope your life is being. Think about visiting or writing. Pray for Slim on his first airplane ride. If you want to laugh or congratulate me about this new situation, you can still call me at 801-644-2903 and get my machine which will have my Orlando number on it.

Chapter Eight

December 1994

Orlando, Florida and Corporate America. Who'd have thought? But here I am. So, where am I? I'm in a place where everyone drives a spanking brand new shiny car. And washes it all the time. And drives it fast and furious all the time. Everyone lives in a spanking new apartment complex, on top of one another. There isn't even a big enough piece of grass to let Slim loose on. Speaking of grass, it's ugly and flat, doesn't bend when you walk on it and it certainly doesn't invite you to luxuriate in it. The food is all brands and all fast at every venue you can think of - and some you haven't - Chuckee Cheese, Macaroni Grill, Miami Subs, TGIF, Taco Bell, Backyard Burger.... This place has no smell and no depth and I work and eat and watch movies.

Corporate America. I cannot believe I did this for 13 years of my life. There is nothing about putting on stockings, putting on airs, putting on a suit, just putting on that appeals to me. It's rush rush rush, get the job done, work harder, work longer, be seen and be heard. And every one's so earnest about it all. I'm right back into the corporate routine of wake up, shower, dress, make-up and drive. Work. Then drive home, stop at the grocery store, at the video store, vegetate in front of the TV, eat until your stomach hurts, go to bed, and do it all again.

So, can you tell? I can't wait to get back to Kanab. When I get home, I can't wait to get more greyhounds, train them, love them and find them good homes.

And here's the really great news (and the pitch). I'm now a bonafide, non-profit, tax exempt, charitable organization called Greyhound Gang. And you can donate anything you'd like. And it will be unbelievably appreciated. And absolutely used directly for the rescue and rehabilitation of ex-racing greyhounds. So, really, does Greenpeace and World Wildlife and United Way really need your money? Not like we do!

So whether in 1994, or 1995 (based on your charitable deduction needs), please find it in your heart to give to the Greyhound Gang. The amount is not the issue, the action is. And the action will be very appreciated by the Gang.

OK. I did it. I asked you for money. It's easier in a letter than in person, that's for sure! The enclosed brochure also helps explain where your dollars will go. And if you can send at least \$30, Slim will send you an autographed copy of the 1995 Greyhound Calendar. (Retail value \$10-12). I will also send a financial statement to donors every year, so you can see exactly how your money is being spent. When I get on Oprah, I'll tell her about all my wonderful friends who helped me get started, and who believed in my dream and journey as much as I did.

Some passing thoughts:

Airport Connections

And you're striding down the airport corridors. Purpose etched in the swinging arms and strutting legs. A plane to catch. I'm someone with somewhere to be. And your periphery vision catches another striding, towards you, purposely. And you look up and catch his eye, and with his arms swinging, he passes you by,

What is it about airports that make you want to make ill-fated calls.

You're passing banks of phones, black, shiny, gleaming - screaming at you - pick me up. Call him! Get him to say he'll miss you. Let him know you're off for exotic parts unknown, without him.

So you call the man who dumped you. Just to say hi...in a cheery voice.

So you call the man you haven't talked to in over a year. Just to say hi...in a cheery voice.

And you call the man you're just getting to know. Just to say hi....in a cheery voice.

Before you take to the sky, airborne, disembodied. Lost . Gone. Whisked into the clouds. To make a final connection.

Wild Thing

And he sits across from you in the car, and says, 'Can I ask a favor?'

And you say 'Sure,' not sure what it can be.

And he says, 'a kiss, I'd like a kiss.'

And you laugh, and say, 'OK.'

And he leans across the car seat and he looks into your eyes, and grazes his lips with yours, and rubs his nose across yours, and kisses each corner of your smile, and grabs the bottom of your lip between both of his, and an hour later you're both counting to ten, and you're trying to think about returning to the car and driving home, and you're sprawled on the grass outside a dorm, and he's 21 and so are you... again.

Since this is tripling as a direct mail piece, Chapter 8 and my Holiday wishes to you, I wanted to write something holiday - like. Something thankful and heartfelt. So I looked back over my year...

The Joy of Small Pleasures:

...like watching the moon rise over my trailer as Slim and I sit on a rock, gazing

...like Gonzo, a neighborhood golden, leaping sage and racing red dirt, as he beats my truck to work daily

...like conversations with my parents that always end in I Love You

...like confidences with friends that always leave me feeling blessed

...like walks in wide open uninhabited lands that give up sights of coyote and fox and raven and rabbit

...like the thoughts that you really do enjoy reading this stuff

...like a touch unasked for

...like the magic of making connections

Wishing you as many small pleasures as you can cram into your life. Joy to the World.

Chapter Nine

February 28 - March 1, 1995

It's the night before my birthday - and I had really (honestly and truly) forgotten that until just now. I'm trying to light a fire in my wood burning stove, and it's been over a half hour and all I can get lit is the matches and paper - and I'm fast running out of both of those. *'Come'n baby light my fire'* A metaphor for my life perhaps - I can light a fire under myself - but I can't seem to get anything else lit. What shall I do with myself tomorrow to make it seem like my birthday? Or should I just not acknowledge it? Not acknowledge it - my mother would croak. We celebrate birthdays big time at the Presto house. Everyone must call everyone else - of course now, my brothers and sister don't even send presents - much less cards, but they will call! Thank goodness my mom and dad always come through with moola and mushy thoughts.

I just ran out to get one of those fake logs - I wanted a fire badly and it just wasn't happening with the wet wood I was using - ahhhh more metaphor - you need the right type of wood to get a fire started and my choice of wood seems to be all wet. *'Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head'* And really I haven't been drinking - though that's a thought I hadn't thought of for tomorrow - maybe I'll try and be drunk all day. My roommate and I tried that once in college - we were going to be drunk all weekend. So we bought three bottles of Cold Duck, started Friday night and at 5am on Saturday morning we fell asleep and woke up feeling so horrible we didn't drink for a long time.

Wow, college - I had a great roommate but we haven't been in touch since college - why is that? I don't even know where she is. We had a blast, she was the coolest person in the dorm and I don't even know where she is? Maybe I should try and find her. So I've just called information cause I think her parents live in Narberth, PA and I got two numbers and I called one and it was her sister-in-law and she gave me Louise's number in Ithaca and she wasn't home - no answer - not even an answering machine - jeez Louise this is the 20th century and no answering machine!! So I'll try again later.

I think I'll go and make rice krispie treats for myself for my birthday tomorrow. I just love rice krispie treats. When I worked at Waldenbooks with some very fun, smart, lovely women we had many schemes to make it rich and famous and not have to work. Of course we concocted all these schemes when we were at work. One of them was a rice krispie treat franchise, kind of like Mrs. Fields, but we would just sell a variety of rice krispie treats. *'Snap, Crackle, Pop'*. So to test the market, we made different kinds of treats - some with chocolate on top, some with nuts inside, some with chocolate chips inside, some with butterscotch chips inside - you name it we thought of it. And then we'd bring in the guys we worked with and make them rate them from 1-10. We kept a running tally on the bulletin board. That year someone came out with rice krispie treats in packages to be sold in stores. I am still known for my ability to bring a mean batch of rice krispie treats as my offering to many fancy meal occasions.

It's the morning of my birthday and I just don't know what to do with myself first. So I tried my old college roommate again, and she was home - and recognized my voice almost immediately and what fun it was to condense our lives into a one hour summary. Me, the traveler, wanderer always looking, sometimes finding. She lived through a marriage not meant to be, though gifted with three kids and a doctorate in music and hooked up with a man from her UConn past. Her laugh was the same, though her delivery was more somber. I was elated to have made a connection to someone who remembers me at 20 and not 42. Yeah, I want to be remembered at 20. If I only knew then what I know now. 'Glory Days'. I've decided that when someone asks me my age I'm going to say 40 until I reach 50 and then I'll say 30. I've decided that the last living virgins on this earth are those of us who have never gotten married (and of course, all your kids). I've decided that when someone says to me, yet again, 'I can't believe you've never been married', I'm going to tell them I'm sleeping with my dog.

I look around this two room upstairs garage apartment, still trying to figure out how I should spend my day and there is stuff everywhere. To my left are my golf clubs and tennis rackets sprawled against the wall, 3 boxes of files from STAMPIN' UP!, an huge empty box which had a new greyhound picture in it, and the first sweetest greyhound up for adoption from the Greyhound Gang, 'Darlin'. On the counter top are piles and piles of different pieces of paper - Visa bills, IRS receipts, letters to answer, birthday cards, lists of things to do. Behind me are more file boxes, filled with Greyhound Gang paraphernalia, home building ideas with little pink post-it notes brightly sticking up, Florida Time Warner files, piles of dog catalogs, and magazines needing to be read and blankets and sheets needing to be put away, wet wood drying in front of the fire and Slim on the couch. I'm not even going to describe what's in the bedroom. I've been back from Florida for a week. And I'm exactly where I want to be.

Hope you're where you want to be on your birthday, doing what you want to be doing and that all your rooms are clean.

Chapter Ten

May/June 1995

My life as a dog.

Since we last spoke, when I went on about my birthday, my life has now gone to the dogs. Greyhounds, of course. Last month I placed 7 from the 9 male dogs I had in my two room apartment. They were hanging from the rafters. I got that wrong, I was hanging from the rafters. I don't think I'll do 9 again, but not because they weren't good. They were fine. I was the one still recovering from the Jazz Fest where I became everyone's second wife, gay and straight, and imbibed more than I have in a year's time, and got pretty sick when I got home. Then I had all these hounds appear in my life, and they were so excited and so didn't want to sleep much, so I didn't get to sleep much, and I scooped a lot of poop, feed a lot of food, gave a lot of baths, taught a lot of stair climbing and killed a lot of ticks, so I'm pretty exhausted. During all this I lost my best guy. Life and death never rest. I find homes for 7, and I lose the best one.

The worst part is when I'm trying to sleep. The pictures flash through my mind, playing over and over, accusing, I lost my big guy today. It was all my fault. I was working, and I let the Slim and Yukon out to run and play for 10 minutes. Yukon wandered into the highway and his neck got broken by a car going fast, and he was laying in the road, with his neck twisted, his big brown eyes wide open and huge patches of his hair totally wiped off from his body. He must have taken the impact straight on and how could anyone have not seen him. How could anyone have hit him. It may have been that I was calling him and he was running towards me, and didn't see the car. Though he'd only been mine for a month, he was the best. He knew we belonged together - he'd been adopted out twice, but insisted on staying with me and he listened when I spoke and he came when I called and he adored me and I adored him and now he's gone. I don't think I will ever forgive myself, it's not like putting a dog down that you've had a good life with - he was only three years old and we were going horseback riding next week once we adopted out all these other guys. He was my best guy and I will miss him so much and I could just rant and wail and shave my head and throw myself down on the grave and just die. I dug his grave and I buried him, and his blood is in my car, and on my clothes and on my skin and will always be on my hands.

This last group I just got is really diverse.

Beauty - found wandering the streets of Tucson. No name. No history. Five years old. 50 lb. fawn female. Doe like eyes that follow you everywhere, pleading. And I stayed up three nights with her as she was running a temp of 104.7, and I didn't want her to die on me. I make hamburger and rice and sit with her while she eats and feed her the rest from my hand that she doesn't want. And she melts and breaks your heart all at once.

Tall Indian (Injun) - A big black teenage adolescent, 80 lb. of inquisitiveness, goofiness and fun. Doesn't want to miss a thing, so always follows you everywhere. Eager to please and eager to have fun. Every morning when he gets up and does his l-o-n-g stretches, he also emits noisy farts. At least they're not the smelly kind. A greyhound fart will clear a room. Broken hock caused the end to a quick, but successful Grade A career.

Go By Jet (Jet) - One tough cookie. Recently spayed and a growth developed near the spay, so we had to perform more surgery. She fought it all the way, wouldn't go down. Now has two incisions with stitches along her abdomen, and she could care less. Full of energy, spunk and I'm going to get my share attitude. Very bossy and very smart. Doesn't take anything from anyone. Is always first to be petted, to be feed.

Jet just left. Her adoptive parents came to pick her up. Is it the right home, will these people really love her, will she be happy? There's a piece of me that is given to each one and a piece of me that is torn out when each one goes. This is what I do now. How I define my life. I take dogs into my home and heart and then I give them to other's homes and hearts. It is the best thing I can do. And it fills me up and tears me apart.

My life really gone to the dogs

Just got back from Men of Seduction. Wouldn't have dreamed of going to a male revue in my former incarnation, but then I wouldn't have gone to The Goofy Movie either.

So I went with 12 other 'it's grown back' virgins. We screamed and howled and gasped and begged and dreamed. We were race car drivers revving our motors waiting for the flag to signal our start. We were junkies drooling for our next fix. We were all wild and brazen and aching for love (?). And we drove home with our engines still running, overheating under the hood, in various stages of withdrawal.

Two nights ago I dreamt I was with Clint Eastwood in a very romantic way. Last night I dreamt I was with Kevin Costner. Tonight, I'm hoping for Kneau Reeves. What a (dream) life I lead.

Also hung out with 10 hockey players in Vegas for the weekend. Not one of them touched me. 'They were showing me 'respect'. Did I ask for this respect? Did I want this respect? Am I that old that all I can get is respect!!!!??????

Other Stuff

You might be asking, as my mom does everytime I speak with her - Are you working? I am utterly consumed by the greyhound thing. My time, my bank account, my heart. But I do put in some hours with my wonderful company - STAMPIN' UP!. I work out of my home for them on any project they earmark for me. I do their monthly newsletter, I've been organizing their personnel materials and doing initial interviews. I help research things like insurance and

copiers. Whatever they want, I do it! And I love working for them, they are the best! I just need a little more discipline, and a few more hours working on their stuff, not greyhound stuff.

Only negative vibes are from current tenants in my CT. home. After months of paying the rent, they've decided the rent is too high, so they went to Fair Housing, and we're now going to a hearing, and they will tell me what I can charge. Unbelievable that someone can tell you how much you can charge for rent. Not like I'm not losing money every single year I own that stupid house.

Trailer Life article still has not appeared. Still working on the letter to Oprah. I'm also writing to Letterman to try to get greyhounds on his show. No other creative stuff happening, except I finally wrote you another chapter. Bought 1.7 acres and am trying to find funding so I can build my greyhound home.

Just got great news! Slim and I are Calendar girls! We will be February in the 1996 greyhound calendar. How appropriate. I'm being kissed by a dog, and that picture is gracing Valentine's Day month. My life as a dog...

*All in the town were still asleep
When the sun came up with a shout
and a leap.
In the lonely streets, unseen by man,
A little dog danced
And the day began.*

—Rupert Brooke

Chapter Eleven

September 1995

New News

It's Saturday at 6:30 in the morning, and I'm on the floor with nuts and bolts and wood and directions and I'm putting together a 72' tower. It's certainly not like the Rapunzel tower where the fair maiden spent her days waiting for the handsome man to rescue her and install the shower massager, replace the toilet bowl, haul eight hoses around 2.5 acres - oh, I've bought a home. 900 sq. ft, pink vinyl sided thing, with fake paneling, orange and brown swirled shag rug and chiffon curtains.

I finally have men on my property. OK, so I had to pay them to be there. They're fixing up my 'estate'. Sprinkler systems, fencing, walls knocked down, walls built up, paneling gone, pasture seeded. Yep, I got me a corral, and I'm gonna get me a horse - even if it is number 10 on the priority list right now.

Tumbleweed - currently green and thorned and jumping out at me all over my property. I put on the heavy duty gloves gifted to me by a tire repair guy on the road to LA when I blew a tire. I walk around the property and I bend down and pick at every tumbleweed in the ground. It's become an obsession - kind of like squeezing pimples in the mirror in college - ah, there's one, there's another one, got that one, yep, there's another.

Dog News

Had five dogs when I moved, then went down to three -my own, Slim and Beauty, and Jennie, a returnee who has recently decided she doesn't like men, and so when someone comes to adopt her, she gets all shy and nervous. Smart one pulling tricks like that! I picked up three more this Friday in Flagstaff. One will go next week to Vegas to a good home. That'll leave 5 - manageable - if the fence gets up!

Getting new greyhounds is such a high. I drive either 4 1/2 hours one way to Flagstaff, or to Tucson for an 11 hour ride. And it flashes by. Because getting new greyhounds is like Christmas gifts waiting to be opened, jigsaw puzzles waiting for the pieces to fall in place, pieces of my heart given out. I'm the one that sees their firsts...

First time they-
lay in the grass and roll around
climb stairs on their own
look in the mirror and bark at the dog they see there
find a stuffed animal and throw it in the air
look at me and realize they've got it made

And then their lasts...

Looks through a fence or a car window, as they go from my life to someone else's. And I want to hug, hold and demand undying loyalty - but I'm silent...outwardly.

And I'm trying to unpack stuff, and a collar ends up in my hand. It's scuffed and worn and smells of dog - one specific dog - Yukon. He's reached out from wherever he is, and he helped me win a contest and a computer. You can read about it in Entrepreneur magazine in November. A day doesn't go by that I don't think of him...and cry.

For all the ones I've adopted out, and all the ones that I'll continue to bring into my home, I lost Yukon and Injun, and their loss is a constant rhythm in my heart.

Greyhound Gang Pitch

Below is information about the Gang income and expenses so you can see exactly where the money you donated went. If you can, I'd really appreciate another donation. It's absolutely and completely tax deductible. If you'd like a 1996 Greyhound Gang calendar - Slim and I are February's calendar girl and dog - please include what you feel is enough of a donation and let me know you'd like one. Slim and I will, of course, autograph it!

Greyhound Gang - Income & Expense From January 1, 1995 through September 1, 1995

Income

Donations 31 2881.31 Everything you donated went directly to the rescue and
Adoptions 11 1520.00 rehabilitation of the dogs. The \$2000 I put in also went to
Me 2005.39 items like fencing, printer, thank you gifts, car repairs etc.

6406.70

Expenses

Travel 1376.05 Tucson, Vegas, Salt Lake, St. George, Cedar City, Flagstaff

Medical 1157.09 This is extremely discounted because of the kindness of Dr. Richard Allen of Salt Lake and Best Friends Animal Sanctuary, Kanab

Advertising 1118.83 Advertisements, Photos, Mailings, Printing of all brochures/adoption forms/manuals, products to help advertise

Dog Supplies 764.72 Food, bedding, toys, chews, collars, tags, shampoos, flea products etc.

Business Supplies 699.86 Paper, printer, folders, binders, etc.

Telephone 698.19 Long distance (Vegas, Utah, Arizona)

Misc. 591.96 Fencing, household, rent, thank-yous, etc.

6406.70

Not figured into the costs are the average 150 hours a month I do greyhound 'stuff' - driving to pick-up, get back, give out, talk about the dogs; phone calls; mail compiling and sending; rewriting materials; xeroxing; daily care etc.

Thank you again for all your kindness over the past 9 months. Without them, these dogs wouldn't be alive.

Cindy and Wes Hanks, of Las Vegas, relate that Mikey redecorated their kitchen floor with all the garbage from the garbage pail. He left not one inch uncovered.

Ed Brown, of Las Vegas, tells of Bingo's trick of opening the screen door on his own, when someone doesn't do it fast enough for him. He also is a voracious reader of all books, magazines and papers that his people leave lying around. Of course, no one can read them after he's through with them.

Jim Matern, of Sandy, Utah, found Tavern to be a wonderful personal trainer. Every morning between five and six a.m., he'd insist that Jim get up (with yodeling and wet kisses) and walk with him. Jim lost 10 lb. the first month!

Rebecca and John Balistere of Las Vegas went on their honeymoon, and when they got back, their greyhound, Matisse, was so upset with them that she went into a corner, and pouted for two days. What was worse was that she'd taught their other dog, Bailey, how to pout, too. When Matisse is not pouting, she's hopping around like a rabbit or sleeping with her head on their pillow.

Coon Dog, who lives with the Meuir's in Las Vegas, has forced the Meuir's to be extra clean. He's a shredding machine and if he finds a paper product at his level -kleenex (his most favorite), school papers, books, Cheese-Its - he'll shred it!

Commander, living with Catherine Finnegan in Vegas, thinks all the remodeling she's doing is to make a track for him in the house. All the furniture is moved out of the rooms being remodeled and he's turned it into a mini track.

Al found that the third home was the charm, and is now living with the Chidsters in St. George. Al cohabits very nicely with 6 children, chickens, rabbits, pigeons, Clem (a dog), and a cat. Al's favorite time of day is getting his own personal egg from the chicken coop.

Hope all is well with you and yours. You have an open invite to visit my humble abode and meet the Gang. Life is so good! Woof Woof.

Chapter Twelve

January/February 1996

Cooking

I wasn't born with the genes necessary to be in a kitchen. I went to a class last night on nutrition from some famous person who's written books, and done talks and has a week long spa thing etc. She went over everything I already know - that complex carbs are what should be 80% of my diet. Fats and protein take up the other 20%. This means giving up cheese and butter and candy and cookies and everything I adore. And adore is the word. For instance, just yesterday I had toffees for breakfast. Caramels for my mid morning snack. Then I made myself an omelet with an olive garlic puree dip I'd made, some cream cheeses and tomato. I also sautéed two English Muffins in butter in the frying pan. I just love toast done that way. For dinner I had cherry licorice - the pull and peel kind. It's really only supposed to be eaten when I travel. When I drive I peel off a long strand with my mouth, and then slowly chew and pull it into my mouth. Keeps me awake.

Then this lady does this class and demonstrates three of her recipes. Aztec Salad - beans, peppers, tomatoes, and a spicy no fat dressing. I loved it. So I bought the recipe book and headed to the store to stock up. I spent more in one trip at the store than I've spent in my two years here. I get home and the beans in the recipe say they need to be baked. They are in a can, and they don't tell you how to bake them. I call a friend. 'How do you bake beans?' 'Claudia, they are already baked if they're in the can.' Duh. Good, I don't have to bake. Then I realize I've forgotten the corn and the coriander. So it's back to the grocery store. Then it's back to the kitchen where everything is laying around, just waiting for me, and the dogs are sniffing everything - especially my hands, cause I'm making a mess.

Computers

I'm working on my computer, and I have background noise on - and it's those incessant talk shows. And they start to invade my consciousness, and suddenly I'm typing a letter to Regis and Kathie Lee cause they're having a Match Makeover contest for Valentine's Day. That's where they make you over and find you a match. So I sent them the Greyhound Gang calendar, highlighting February, where I'm being kissed by Slim and I've asked them to find me a man to kiss in February. - Is there no end to my search? Watch for me on the Howard Stern show next...

Crap

Men-o-pause - yes, There has been a pause of men in my life - so obviously I'm in menopause. I know I should buy a book and find out, but I'm so loath to acknowledge that something called that could be happening to me. Do you think I'm being punished because I had so many

wonderful men in my life during my twenties and thirties. Did I have a quota, and if I used it up early - then does that mean I'm high and dry of the rest of my life?

Cuteness

This little puppy Buie. He was running across a highway in December, avoiding an oncoming car, and saw me and the hounds. He dashed over to us, wiggling and oozing puppyhood, and jumped right in the car with Beauty and Slim. No one claimed him as theirs, so he quickly became ours. Beauty and Slim wanted nothing to do with him. This little puff ball of black and brown fur, mugging for attention. Then one day he enticed Beauty into play. And they rolled and tumbled and ran over dirt and dust and rocks, pulling and tugging and biting. He tried to leap over sage like Beauty did, his little legs thrusting him only 6 inches off the ground and directly into a bush. But undeterred, he kept going, a puppy daredevil, defying the god that made him a husky shepherd mix. He sleeps under the bed, next to my head and wakes me in the morning with kisses and cuddles. We can't keep him, cause we're the greyhound gang. He needs a home of his own. Another piece of my heart...gone.

I'm exhausted. Physically and emotionally. I've been loving and leaving dogs for 2 weeks now, and my heart needs a rest.

Craziness

And life is trying to creep back to that East Coast style. Of running, running here and there, and not thinking about the why or the where. I've bought the home and it ties me down. How do I balance the need for security with the need to wander? How do I do all the things I want, when I have to make money? And it seems that all I ever do is spend money. I'm losing sight of life, because that life with things like making money and bills and nasty people are piling up. I want to shed my skin and begin a new year again. I resolve to get away once a month, and I resolve to save more greyhound lives and I resolve to be a better person this year than last. I wish someone would come along and take care of me, cause I'm so tired of taking care of myself. Did I just say that? As I get old and gray, will I become known as the greyhound lady? Did I use up all my loves by the time I was 32? Will I get another opportunity to love a man?

Cosmetics

I'm obviously feeling the ravages of age, and a fast approaching birthday. On an early Sunday morning, I found myself in front of the TV mesmerized by an infomercial for cosmetics. I actually sat, watched it and charged my credit card.

For 42 years, I haven't worn make-up, and now I think it'll change my life. Like moving to Kanab wasn't enough?

Ciao

As I sit here working on my computer and the winter wind howls outside, the dogs are all splayed out around me. Snuggled on pillows, on couches, on dog beds spread out throughout the floor and under my feet. I can't imagine a place I'd rather be.

Chapter Thirteen

April 12, 1996

As I typed that chapter heading, I really thought about whether I should just skip to 14. Hotels don't have a 13th floor, Friday the 13th brings shivers to many, well 13 has really gotten a bad rap. And it's very funny to be starting chapter 13, with the news you all have been waiting for.

First, you need to know that this letter is only going out to my 'girlfriends'. I don't want to censor it, and frankly the men just aren't ready for this. They just wouldn't understand. Except Ron. He's getting a copy.

Everything feels different lately. I'm walking differently. I'm talking differently. I'm even laying around differently. I was just lolling around on a comforter on the lawn, basking in the warm sun rays, with Beauty at my head, and Lucky Don at my feet. The pure sensual pleasure of just soaking and sensing and sighing.

Sighing when he ran his hands through my hair, and every fiber leaped out to his touch. When his lips touched mine, and I felt opened, engulfed, drowned and saved all at once. When I unbuttoned his shirt, and his skin was silk and his nipples were candy. When I released his penis from his pants, and it stretched toward me, begging, insisting to be touched. And I lost myself in the joy and the ecstasy and the fear and the unknown. And it's been so long, and I'm so glad to find I'm still alive.

Yep. I met a guy. And though I did try to orchestrate some of it, in the end it was all him, and it made all the difference.

Ok. The specifics.

I enjoy unique things. And with antiques you can find treasures, one of a kind things. Lately when I'm in Vegas I stop at this antique mart where they have about 50 booths with different vendors. They've gotten to know me there, and my greyhound passion and my search for antiques. One older woman, Sally, who's thinking about adopting a greyhound, brings me over to a new booth, where there is a strawberry, shoulder length hair, Irish, lean and lanky guy, Mikel. We talk and I leave.

Sally stops by to see my greyhounds the next day, and I ask, 'were you trying to set me up?'

'Sure was,' was her reply.

'And what did he think?,' I queried.

'He thought you were cute!', she responded. 'But his marriage broke up because his wife had too many animals, so he doesn't want to get involved with someone who has lots of animals.'

'You tell him I don't kiss guys who smoke, and I only own two dogs!', was my retort. Enough said. I gave him nary another thought.

A month of two later, I stop at the antique store. He's there. So's Sally. We talk a bit, but I don't pick up any major interest on his part. So I buy a few things that he's going to fix up, and as I leave, as say, 'I hope you don't charge \$50 an hour for the repair'. His response was, 'I charge \$100 an hour.' My retort, 'There are some things I would consider paying \$100 for.' He laughs and I leave.

While I'm doing my errand around Vegas, I decide to call back Sally and invite her to join me for a drink that night at a bar where I'm meeting a greyhound adopter who is playing and singing. She says she'll think about it, I tell her to mention it to Mikel if she wants to, and we leave it at that.

That night when I walked into the bar at 10:30 p.m., after watching *Dead Man Walking* and *The Birdcage*, there he was waiting for me. He grabbed my hand, placed me in the seat next to him and bought me a beer. My whole body had gone warm just seeing him. There is something to be said for not having expectations and then having any expectations you may have had, totally blown away. I wonder if I can learn to go through life with no expectations, because then everything would be so f'ing fantastic.

Within 15 minutes of our conversation, he had kissed me. And that proceeded to hands in my hair, and hands on my neck, and hands on my back and we still hadn't left the bar.

We ended up in his van. He wanted to take me home. Unfortunately, as we were driving to 'his home' I discovered that it was a trailer he shared with his parents. 'I don't think so,' I screamed, and made him pull over immediately. We were in a deserted parking lot between a Rebel convenience store and a hotel. And we couldn't keep our hands off each other.

Back to high school we went.

'Stop, stop. I don't want to do this here'

'I just want to hold you, you feel so good, it's been so long'

It's been longer for me'

'NO, it's been longer for me.'

'No, me.'

'No, me.'

'OK, how long.'

'Since July.'

'Got you beat- two years!'

'Ohhhhh'

His van is loaded with antiques. He shows me a picture drawn of Frank Lloyd Wright by one of his students. 'I was offered \$7500, but it's worth at least \$10,000,' he says. He pulls out his junk box, full of pins, and rings and bracelets and dresses me in them. He shows me a porcelain doll, for whom he's looking for just the right dress. And we lay down on a 48 star flag.

A knock at the window. The police.

'Are you all right, miss', they ask, with concern. Thank god, I'm still clothed.

I'm just fine, thank you officer,' I squeak out.

'OK, but I suggest you roll up these windows and lock these doors.'

'OK, thanks.'

'We have got to get out of here. We could go to jail.'

'Naw, we're OK.'

And my mind says were not, but it really doesn't have any say here.

An hour later. A face at the window. Another policeman.

'Miss, you OK?' And he sees the grin on my face, and answers his own question, 'Well if you're smiling like that, everything must be OK!'

And everything was OK. He was sweet and generous and lovely and a kisser and a toucher. I got not one wink of sleep, and the morning dawned, and I was higher than a kite.

I did keep my clothes on all night. He's coming to visit tomorrow. The satin sheets will be on the bed. The candles will be lit. The champagne will be drawn. This is chapter 13 and I don't feel unlucky at all.

Birthday Musings

One morning you wake up and it's your birthday. The day you were birthed. The day all this began, when you came mewling into this lifetime. Mewling because you probably knew exactly what it was you were going to go through. Mewling because you remembered where you had just come from, and you wanted to go back!

So you wake up on this day of your birth and you sing Happy Birthday to yourself. And you go to the bathroom and perform your ablutions. And you make a piece of toast. You walk the dogs and wonder at their constant joy in life.

You wonder how to ensure this is an extra special day of joy for yourself.

Do you go buy the food you adore - pull and peel licorice, licorice allsorts, lobster, amaretto ice cream?

Do you go do the things you adore - read, buy gifts, eat, ride horses, hike, play with the dogs, watch movies?

Do you look deep inside and say I'm so glad to be alive?

Who could ask for a better life? I do what I want when I want. Most of the time. OK, some of the time. I have dogs that love me every day, I have friends and family that love me every day. I have a home filled with things I love. I have sunny days and starry nights. I have hair to die for. I have you. I have me.

Chapter Fourteen

Summer Rehash October 13, 1996

Summer time may be over for you, but it's 85 degrees here today! Just spent my morning with 30 greyhounds on their way to Idaho. Sunnie and Ajar stayed behind to join the Greyhound Gang. All five are sacked out after baths. They hate me when I do that to them! Rode for 3 hours yesterday through clefted canyons, and am still tingling. Have to get my horse next! Here's some verbal masturbation from this summer. Call, write, visit!

Tomato Sandwiches

I planted my first garden this year, and I have growing things in it! I harvested my first tomato, and I will be making a tomato sandwich for lunch today. Tomato sandwiches make me think about my grandma, whose garden I spent hours in, pulling off tomatoes, biting into them while sitting in the garden dirt and letting the red juice and seeds dribble down my chin and into my hands. I could sit and eat tomatoes all day back then. And I think of my dad, and the marigolds he'd plant around his garden, and the weeding he'd do, and the watering he'd make me do. The smell of the tomato plants, the picking of the fruit they made, the putting of them in a basket, and the putting of them in my mouth.

A lady who almost adopted a greyhound gave me herb plants. And boy did they grow. I have two rows of parsley. But grow is all they did, since I don't have the foggiest notion of what to do with them! Though I do run my hands through them and capture the smell.

Dog Walking

When I walk the dogs before I go to bed at night, and there's no moon, the red rocks that surround this town look like ghostly mountains out of time. They appear against the backdrop of the black, star dotted sky, and I swear I see temples from Ancient Egypt, and entrances to vast sphinx like tombstones. Does this mean I'm being buried in Kanab?

This morning, just like every other early morning, the dogs thought I should get up and take them for a walk. So though I was buried under covers and pillows, they managed to stick their long wet noses under all covers. They get gleeful pleasure in rubbing these long noses incessantly and insistently, on my back, in my arm pits, on my head, anywhere they can get to, until I get out of bed and give them their walk wish.

Hiking with six dogs this morning, I let them all off leash. They cavorted and gavotted and ran and walked and demonstrated yet again, what living is all about.

Dead Dog

Floppy, in his physical being passed away today. Floppy had lived and slept with me for over 40 years. He'd been patched and hugged and loved. He met his physical death ignominiously, when Maybelline, a high spirited, stuffed animal loving, young greyhound, took him in her mouth, and tore him to pieces. He's all over my floor, in bits and pieces, because my vacuum is not working. I guess it's kind of like spreading ashes, but it's sawdust and stuffing. And I feel like I've failed him by not protecting him from the world, when he protected me from everything for so many years.

ODE TO FLOPPY

Written 1991

I needed an operation. I have fibroid tumors in my uterus. Pulsing, growing masses of pulpy muscle tissue. Chomping through my uterine lining.

Male doctors in NY want to take out all my female parts, a hysterectomy. After all, I'm 35, not married, and it doesn't appear that I'll be producing babies. They flourished a paper for me to sign absolving them of guilt. I walked out of their offices, and headed to the library. In the library I found a book by a Californian female doctor that stated that hysterectomies are only needed when cancer has taken residence. Pulpy muscle tissue masses can be removed and female organs can stay intact. I called her office, sent her all my medical records and booked the flight. I would fly to California for Female Reconstructive Therapy.

I'd never needed an operation before and here I was, going to LA, for major surgery. My mom hates to fly, and my sister had a job she couldn't leave. I knew I needed someone with me to be my support. So when I got on the plane, so did Floppy.

Floppy traveled with me in an open blue canvas sailing bag. He's 3 feet long, brown with multi-colored and multitudinal patches sewn over the last 34 years by me on his long, oblong body. One foot is clubbed, one eye is missing, one ear is torn. He's slept in my arms, listened to everything I've said and cried with me. He'd was to be my link to home, my anchor through the operation.

When I got to LA, I spent two days in the doctor's headquarters, watching tapes of the operation, reading about it and meeting with the doctor. Her arrogance was staggering., but that was OK with me. She knew she knew her stuff, and I knew she knew her stuff. And that was all I wanted. Someone who would take these masses of muscle out of me, and leave me whole. If, during our sessions, she wanted to discuss what kind of car to buy, or how she dated Mark Harmon, I'd follow her lead. During the operation, I'd be trusting her explicitly.

I had to check into the hospital the night before the operation. At 7pm, my girlfriend, Fran, went with me to drop off my belongings. When we got to the room, there were two beds. A made one near the door, and a unmade one near the window. I wanted the window view, so I

placed Floppy, a Get Well balloon and my herb sleep pillow on the egg carton mattress of the unmade bed. My toiletries and clothes were placed on the chair beside it. Fran and I left for dinner.

About 9:30pm, I returned, alone. Walking into the hospital room, I saw that both beds were now identically made, but Floppy was gone. I walked out to the nurses' station, and quietly asked where my dog might be.

They said, "Oh, housekeeping must have picked it up". We'll call them and get back to you." I dutifully returned to my room to wait. At 10:30, I went back to the nurses' station.

"Excuse me, I'm still waiting for my dog," I inquired. "Also", I went on, "a Get Well Balloon and my herb sleeping pillow are gone, too." The nurse stared at me. "Housekeeping is closed for the night. We'll check with them in the morning. Now you need to go to your room, and go to bed."

I hesitated, not wanting to make a big deal over this, but Floppy was a big deal to me, as was the operation next morning.

"I understand," I replied, "but couldn't someone just go to housekeeping and get him for me. I've traveled 3000 miles for an operation and no one is with me but Floppy and I'd really like to have him with me tonight. Also, my operation is tomorrow morning, and I won't be around to get him back."

She again stared fiercely at me. "Go back to your room, someone will be right there."

It took more than 1/2 hour for someone to come. By then I'd parked my chair in the doorway and made myself very visible. This time they were not going to forget to send someone to see me.

It was after 11pm and I had started to cry. Something was wrong. How hard could it be to get my dog back? My Floppy, who had traveled here with me to give me support and make sure I made it through the operation safely. Nurses walked up and down the hallway, dispensing medicines and care to others on the floor. They barely glanced my way. Suddenly, there were three of them in front of me, asking me to please move the chair back into the room and go to bed. With tears streaming down my cheeks, they followed me into the room.

"The housekeeper thought the prior patient had left the dog and other things on the bed. So she wrapped it all up in the egg carton mattress and put it into the compactor."

My brain froze. A compactor? What did that mean?

"I'm sorry, I don't understand what you are saying to me. Why don't you just get him out? I can certainly go to this compactor and remove him, as I know you have more important things to do. But don't you understand how important he is to me?" And the tears started anew.

"Honey," a nurse who'd just come on the shift said, "he's been compacted. We can't get him out. There are yards of waste materials in that compactor. Now you have to calm down and go to sleep. You've got an operation tomorrow."

With that they left. I closed the door and balled. Balled for all the years Floppy had given to me, for me dragging him out here, and for his ignoble demise. To be squashed in a compactor with medical waste. The balling turned to anger, as my brain started functioning. Why hadn't they told me sooner? If they'd really called Housekeeping, why couldn't Floppy have been taken out before things were compacted. I had to see for myself. I wasn't going to just accept what they said. After all, I hadn't accepted what the doctors had said I needed back in the East.

I made up my bed so it looked like I was sleeping in it. I opened the door, carefully and quietly, and when the nurses were all engaged in their business, I snuck down the hall. I had no idea where I was going. But I had to know the truth about Floppy. I found a door at the end of the hallway. I was 8 floors up. I ran down them. At ground level, I opened the door to find a police car sitting at the curb. I hurriedly closed the door. Would he stop me? Did I have a choice? So I slipped open the door, placed a rock in the jam, and walked nonchalantly past him and into the bowels of the hospital's basement level. I didn't know what I was looking for, but suddenly there it was in front of me. A door marked "Housekeeping". I went to the door and knocked. A very surprised Spanish lady opened the door. On her desk was the balloon and the pillow. I pointed at the stuff and yelled, "My dog, where's my dog". In her broken English, she told me the dog was gone. I asked her to show me the compactor. She didn't want to, but my tears persuaded her.

She brought me to an area where a blue iron trash bin, 30 feet by 10 feet by 7 feet, resided. She shook her head, sorrow etched on her face, when she saw the tremors coursing my face. If Floppy was in there, he was dead. But I couldn't let him go. I climbed up on this blue monster and down on three feet deep of trash that had not yet been compacted. I jumped into the monster's bowels and hauled out every piece of that trash. Kotex, swabs, hospital gowns, remnants of food not eaten, even needles and medicine. I searched it all. Floppy was not there, wrapped in his protective egg carton mattress. He was compacted.

I stumbled back to my room. Numb. I changed into my sterile gown, fell into bed, pulled the covers over my head and stuffing my face into the pillow, just balled. I'd seen it with my own eyes. Floppy was gone. I'd had him for 33 years, and I'd brought him out here to provide solace for me, but all I'd done was bring him to his death. Floppy was my Velveteen Rabbit. He knew all my secrets. He loved me when others had not. He was my rock. My confidant. My dog. And he was buried forever amid tons of medical waste.

It was 3 am and more nurses appeared at the foot of my bed. They tried to give me sleeping pills. They told me that I was too distraught and if I didn't stop crying and get some sleep the operation would not happen. I glared at them with clenched teeth, red eyes and cheeks worn with crying.

"I will NOT take your pills. And you will not prevent me from having this operation. It is why I'm here, it's why Floppy is gone, and I will have this operation tomorrow morning."

I fell into an exhausted sleep. There was nothing left to do. The reality was that Floppy was gone . And I had to let him go.

Addendum: The head housekeeper went to the dump with the truck and picked Floppy out of all the waste. When I came out of my operation, he was waiting for me.

Type A personality

I left the East coast to get away from my Type A personality, but it found me here, tucked away among red rocks and Mormons. There's no escaping who you are. It always finds you and slaps you right in the face. 'Thought you could get rid of me', it says, 'I don't think so.'

I've been working 15 hours day, preparing for 800 women at a STAMPIN' UP! convention in Las Vegas. It will be a monster. I will be very glad when it is over, and I will be taking a nice long vacation, and enjoying myself somewhere else.

I took my vacation with my sister in Montana. We drove around to every grocery store in Billings looking for Good Humor Toasted Almond ice cream bars. There wasn't one in the entire city. I had three bad dreams. I was on location for a plane crash. Then on location for a train crash. And then right there when a shark attacked everyone in the water, and by brother was in the water. (He lived)

Tunes

I'm doing the driving thing, which I love, and surfing for tunes on the radio. And Maybe I'm Amazed comes on - and I flash back to Glenn, my first love, and the watch I bought him when I traveled cross country in Switzerland, and had engraved with 'Maybe I'm Amazed' on it. For the next hour, I'm lost in the reveries of that first love, and first loss. But I mostly remember the love.

And then Heatwave comes on, and it's me on my first cross country trip at 27. Playing that song over and over again, and just groovin, and telling myself that if I ever get married, I'm going to wear a red dress, and have this song playing!

I pop in a tape from that cross country trip - it's 16 years old. The tape is Jean-Pierre Rampal - a flutist and pianist - and that music evokes the solitary drive I took, and the wonders that unfold on the road. The lone buffalo in South Dakota. The moose, head down in the he reeds. The brother and sister in full baseball regalia, playing catch.

Family

My mom, dad and sister came to visit for a week. They stayed in the beautiful guest house su casa Presto. We ate pecan sandies, almond roca, apples, subway, pizza hut, pistachio nuts. We played pinochle every day and the team of dad and me whipped the other two's butts. We drove around the area. We made gagging noises because Lad farted all the time. We played golf every day. Then when we went to Mesquite to drop off my parents for a week of senior citizen gambling, and my sister hit the poker video machine for \$1250! She is very lucky in cards. No comment about love.

Greyhound Update

It's that time of year, and I still continue to need your on-going support. Your donations this year have been the mainstay of the organization.

Miko

Miko had been passed around. Her current residence, in Salt Lake, meant that she was tied up all day long with no attention or love. Her prior lives were as a breeder, living outside. So shy initially, she lived behind my chair for two days. But once she trusted, she was Little Miss Playful. She's now living, happily, with another greyhound, Buddy, in Las Vegas.

Mickey

When I first saw Mickey, I renamed him 'Wooly-Booly'. (Sam the Sham and the Pharoahs, anyone?) He had no hair on his spine, compliments of a raging skin disease and then soft tufts of black, yellow and brown hair covering his sides. He ran to me, smiling and showing off his two inch overbite, his little ears, and odd shaped head. Anyone that came to the house was treated to ferocious barking and teeth baring - the first greyhound guard dog! Behind that first impression was the most loving, sweet stud muffin to come through the Greyhound Gang's doors. He'd stretch himself out on my bed, pretending to be my bed warmer (in 90 degree heat), follow me everywhere and do whatever I commanded. He's now the king in a household of 2 Doberman girls and 2 Siamese babes.

Lad

Laddie was a handful the first month. Unwanted at 6 years old, he's a macho black boy. Only 2/3 of tail, not cat safe, not little kid safe, can't be left alone, he marked my house, secretly, for the first month. Puts food in his mouth, carries it somewhere else and drops it! Nine teeth pulled. I nicknamed him Freight Train, as he is so powerful he just does whatever he wants. But now I call him Soul Train, cause he gives me these looks that just make me cry.

None of these dogs would be alive today if it weren't for your on-going support of the Greyhound Gang. Thank you!

Chapter Fifteen

April 1997

When I was thirteen I told my mom, 'I'm not getting married until I'm 33'. I'm sure, way back then, I wasn't making a statement on marriage, but was probably just reacting to not ever wanting to grow-up. Growing up meant having children, a job and a husband. Growing up meant marriage because that's the only time you could have children (that's what my mom told me) and it's when you got a husband. Well, at thirteen, I wasn't having any of it.

So I'm now a 44 year old ungrown-up, with no children, no husband and no job.

It's been my choice to not have a husband. It's been my choice to not have a job - though retired is a nicer thought. But it hasn't been my choice to be childless. Nine years ago, I flew from Connecticut to California for an operation that ensured I'd keep my uterus, and my options for children. And though I hardly used birth control for the next nine years, I never got pregnant. I wasn't really trying to, I just thought I'd let fate handle it. Of course, you do have to have sex to have children, and there hasn't been much of that during those nine years either. Yet last month, I had to drive to Las Vegas and let doctors cut out my ability to have children. It was a cut that took out more than a pulsing fibrous mass larger than my fist.

I solicited and got many opinions from doctors, friends and acquaintances. Everyone had something to say as to my child bearing needs and abilities. 'Just do it, you're not having kids anyway.' 'Your womb is only there for one thing. And it's not a thing you're going to need.' 'What's the big deal? Lots of women have hysterectomies.'

And I appear to be surrounded by mothers and children. Children and mothers. They are everywhere. And they swear it's the best thing they've ever done. The growing of something alive and part of them - within their own bodies. The instant love and protectiveness that occurs. The need to keep this child safe, help her grow and just be. The bond that only a birth mother and child can have. Something I will never feel.

I don't know if I can ever come to terms with what I'm missing. I don't know if I can ever be totally aware of what I don't have. The growing mass of cells, muscles and bones that comes out of you mewling and sucking and looking for love. I do know that something is gone. And that I've spent nine years thinking about it. A nine year decision to remove that pulsing fibrous mass. An operation that took 43 minutes.

But it's done. Over. And instead of ruminating about what could have been, but I'd rather ruminate about what can be - what will be. Because there's plenty of love to be had - for the giving and for the taking.

And speaking of love. I've met a man. A real man. An almost 49 year old man, with history and scars and ideas and hair on his chest. Here's what I wrote when I first met him, four months ago.

One more time. I am alive. The angst of 'he does like me' to 'I don't know how he feels about me'. The thoughts of 'I could sleep with him right now, right here' to 'Take it slow, he's not going anywhere'. He made me a salad and rice tonight, as I worked on my syllabus for my English class. He sat on the sofa and cuddled both me and Beauty. He rubbed the spot between my shoulder blades that makes me contract and melt. He told me I was classy. He told me I was pretty. I wanted to give this man anything he wanted. And he wants to woo me and he wants to win me. And though I'm the one saying 'Let's take it slow', he's the one acting - nice and slow.

And how do you stop the thoughts of 'is this the one? Could I fall in love with this one? Is this the one that will make me stay in Kanab? Does he have enough for me to love? Can he love me in return? Does he believe in love? Does he want to get married? Do I want to get married? Stop stop stop. These careening freight train thoughts that will get me derailed if I stoke them too long.

I have a habit of doing everything too fast. Of driving too fast, of eating too fast, of loving too fast. The driving too fast has not resulted in an accident, though people have given me the finger. The eating too fast has resulted in weight gain, at times, though nothing to worry about. The loving too fast, though, could have serious ramifications. Saying I Love You, before love has a chance to grow. Talking about moving in, when you haven't even moved forward. Assuming that this is the one when you don't even know the man. Wanting to go to the Elvis chapel and just say, 'I Do!'

Greyhound Update

Saving greyhounds to me, is probably a lot like brushing your teeth is to you. It's something I just do. I don't think about it. It's just a part of my life. When I don't do it, I miss it. When I am doing it regularly, it makes me feel better. It's important to me, my health and my life.

Many of you have taken the time to send money and love, and every single penny and warm thought has been appreciated. This year my placements were up 30%, though the increase was mostly because of dogs that were returned from prior placements. Unfortunately, half of my costs still come out of my savings. (No job on the horizon)

In 1996, one of my adopters created a web site for the Greyhound Gang, at no charge. Please check it out. It's awesome! [Http://www.mindspring.com/~npcwoody/greygang.htm](http://www.mindspring.com/~npcwoody/greygang.htm) or type Greyhound Gang using the Yahoo search engine.

Here is a synopsis of my expenses and income for 1996. Again, thank you for helping. (If you can help in 1997, please do!) You're assured a spot in doggie heaven. Thirty six dogs adopted: 33 in Nevada, 2 in Utah, 1 in California

22 males, 14 females (Love those boys)
20 brindles, 4 fawns, 7 blacks, 5 white w/spots (Love those brindles)
2 yrs - 11 3 yrs - 13 4 yrs - 5 5 yrs - 5 6 yrs - 1 8 yrs - 1
One adoptable dog died. Ajar punctured a lung when he fell when running.

Expenses \$12,426.85
Advertising 1727.73
Ads, Photos, Post Office, Xeroxing, Products

Medical Best Friends, Dr. Allen, GAL, Medicine 2,231.51

Supplies Bedding, Food, Collars, Misc 2738.73

Phone 1258.25

Transportation 3140.99
Fuel, Dog Sitting, Meals, Travel

Dues/Education/Tax 297.50
Home Repair 540.00
Office 492.14

Income \$12,426.85

Adoptions 36 placements/7 returns \$3115 = \$87 per dog range = \$0- \$200

Friends/Acquaintances 24 friends \$2123 = \$88 per friend range = \$10 - \$400

Misc 2 programs \$758 ASPCA/Voyager's

Me \$6430.85

Ajar - in memory

He never hit his stride, except in death. He'd sit on a dog bed with a constant bewildered look on his face. Unable to focus his attention on any one thing, he'd go along with whatever was asked of him, but no light of understanding ever blinked on. It was as if he was a potter's vase, still on the wheel, turning and turning and being formed. He'd been with me three weeks, when I let him off leash to run with three other hounds. His countenance lit up, his body stretched out, and he started running circles of joy around me. In joy, he tripped into a small ravine, followed by the other dogs. He walked out to me, and I checked for cuts and abrasions. There were none. But he died in my arms 5 minutes later, gagging and spewing blood.

Chapter Fifteen redux

One more time. I am alive. The angst of 'he does like me' to 'I don't know how he feels about me'. The thoughts of 'I could sleep with him right now, right here' to 'Take it slow, he's not going anywhere'. He made me a salad and rice tonight, as I worked on my syllabus for my English class. He sat on the sofa and cuddled both me and Beauty. He rubbed the spot between my shoulder blades that makes me contract and melt. He told me I was classy. He told me I was pretty. I wanted to give this man anything he wanted. And he wants to woo me and he wants to win me. And though I'm the one saying 'Let's take it slow', he's the one acting -nice and slow.

And how do you stop the thoughts of 'is this the one? Could I fall in love with this one? Is this the one that will make me stay in Kanab? Does he have enough for me to love? Can he love me in return? Does he believe in love? Does he want to get married? Do I want to get married? Stop stop stop. These careening freight train thoughts that will get me derailed if I stoke them too long. And I sit here surrounded by the love of my dogs, and it may be that someday I'll have the love of this man.

Racquetball

We play racquetball almost every day at noon. At least, he plays racquetball. I think about what he'd look like without his clothes, and why am I on this court, when I'd rather be losing calories some other way. And he wins 15-0. So then I steel my mind and I concentrate, and I win a point, and then he brushes against me, and he wins 15 - 1.

Anticipation

We haven't done it yet. I say I think we should wait. That it's too important not to wait. That I'm not going anywhere. That if this is real he'll wait with me. That sex screws everything up. well not having sex screws everything up too.

It's like knowing you're going out for this great meal. Lobster with drawn butter, a smoky white wine, candles. And you savor the flavors before they've even touched your lips. And you smell the bouquet before you've even sat down. And your body clenches and unclenches, gets hot and gets cold, shivers and tingles - all in anticipation.

And night comes, and you read yourself silly, just to get him off of your mind. But when the lights go out, and you're alone with your pillows and dreams, it takes no time at all to imagine him next to you, with his hungry hands careening down your body, and his lips devouring anything in sight, and you don't ever think you'll have a meal like this again.

Future

I want to experience this for the moment. I want to enjoy every touch he gives me and every look. I don't want my mind to go leaping out to the Elvis chapel in Las Vegas where we could get

married in a minute. Why do these thoughts even intrude, why is that so important? Cause in our first month together, he asked me. I've avoided being married for 43 years. I am an independent woman of independent means and I don't need a man to fulfill me or my life. But I sit around and write Claudia Dale, and I take his name O'Connor Dale and my name, Claudia Presto, and I cross out like letters and I do the love, marring, indifference, hate thing and I take an apple stem and twirl it until he comes off on a letter of his name. And my mind just refuses to take what if, but to make what can be, and I don't want to jinx anything, and I don't want to make this a fantasy - I want this to be real - really real!

Family

His cousins and daughters were here for a week over thanksgiving. It has been exhausting. I'm so used to my quiet life and the need to only care for myself. And now there were many others to care for and think about, and I slipped into it like an old glove. But I relished the times I was alone in my bed with my dogs and my books. His daughters are sweet and experiencing all those growing pains that teenagers do when they grow. Selfishly I want him all to myself, Honestly I know that can never be.

Sickness

In sickness and in health - last night we spent the night together and I had a wicked cold. I had to breath through my mouth, and blow my nose in a whole box of Kleenex. And he still held me and told me he loved me. What is this?

And then he made me spend a second night with him. And the cold is raging, and the nose is Rudolph red and he's telling me I'm the most beautiful thing he's ever seen. And I think I'm sick?!

Being a couple

It feels so warm, yet so unreal, to be part of a couple. To be at a party, and have a man come over and put his arms around you and kiss you - claiming you as his. To overhear people say, 'do you know OC is seeing Claudia?' To know you're not alone, that you've got someone to care for you, to look at you, to make you feel loved.

Trepidation

I am so scared. Scared that this man loves me and I'm going to blow it. Scared that we both may be fooling ourselves, and just in love with the thought of love. Yet he makes me laugh, and I melt in his arms and I feel like I've know him all my life - and that this may be IT. Whatever IT is.

Absence makes the Heart Grow Fonder

I was in Vegas for the weekend, doing my greyhound thing and visiting with friends, and he couldn't come with me. I really thought that was best, because I move around a lot in Vegas, jumping from one thing to another, and having him with me would deter me from getting all my errands done. But I thought about him every where I went. I felt less because he wasn't with me. I bought him gifts everyplace I went. I even brought pictures of him and looked at them in my hotel room.

Too Fast

I have a habit of doing everything too fast. Of driving too fast, of eating too fast, of loving too fast. The driving too fast has not resulted in an accident, though people have given me the finger. The eating too fast has resulted in weight gain, at times, though nothing to worry about. The loving too fast, though, could have serious ramifications. Saying I Love You, before love has a chance to grow. Talking about moving in, when you haven't even moved forward. Assuming that this is the one when you don't even know the man.

Babies

How silly is this? I've been seeing this man for a month - OK, everyday for a month - and I've been told I have to have a hysterectomy, and now I'm wondering if we should have a baby. And he's no help, cause he says if you want to have a baby I'll have one with you - though his two babies are no longer babies at 13 and 15. I call all my friends and they say it's the best thing you could ever do, it's the hardest thing you could ever do, it's the most life-changing thing you could ever do. And I've never done it. And it looks like I won't ever do it.

What I Will Do

I believe I will love this man for a long time. I will float the river with him. I will show him the places I've been. He will show me the places he's been. I will make sure it always stays new. We will make love, in some way, every single day. We will make each other feel loved every single day.

Christmas

He gave me a ring last night. A huge motherf***** ring. From the MGM Grand in Vegas. It's so big (how big is it) that I wear it on my wrist. I am in love with this man.

Chapter Sixteen

December 1997

Happy Holidays! Wow, you know what, time flies, even when you're not having fun. When I sat down and put fingers to keyboard, a very heartfelt and unfortunately, totally depressing letter came out, and after reading it a few days later, I just couldn't send it. I mean, it's the holidays, and I'm supposed to be cheery, no bah humbug depressed. I mean, it may be who I am right now, but it's not who I am, really, nor who I want to be. So what if I'm a bit stuck where I am right now, and it has been a bit quicksandy, but I'm fighting like hell to get unstuck. But you don't need to be dragged down into that mire, so instead I'm going to do this free writing thing. In the hopes that it'll end up a wicked treatise on what has happened to me since I last wrote.

Menopausal Women with Concealed Weapons-In homage to Dr. Seuss

Is it something in the air? Is something in my hair? Can this really be me? What am I doing in this tree? I dream at night of great big fights. And when I wake, I am a fright. I just don't get what it is that frets. But I'm totally perplexed and constantly a wreck.

Nothing is going right lately. No job, no money, no man, no friends, no Slim, no life. Katie Couric pisses me off every morning with that saccharin smile. The phone ringing pisses me off. The phone not ringing pisses me off. Rosie O'Donnell, my new role model, is even starting to piss me off.

So my oh-so-proper English girlfriend, Elizabeth and I were whacking balls with ferocity around the golf course. We reveled in the red cliffs and solitude that surrounded us, and we reviled the people and things that bugged us. We were pissed off about being pissed off. We discussed shoveling lots of drugs into our body - prozac, hallucinogenics, good humor toasted almond ice cream bars, St. John's Wart. And then we hit on a plan. A plan to get back our control. A plan to roar, to be heard. We would get concealed weapons permits - and we would be guntoting, rootin', tootin', rough and ready women in the new year. In even went so far as to call my Dad to see if he had his police revolver from 45 years ago. Alas, he'd given to the butcher in town.

To job, or not-to job

I haven't had a real job this year. OK, I taught one 'college level' English class to a group of high school students. I took this assignment because I had vague memories of enjoying teaching and remembering that I was good at it. I took this assignment to have some fun. I wish I'd never taken this assignment. This once a day class turned into 30-hour weeks, as I attempted to bring the grade level of these students, the cream of the Kanab crop, from seventh grade to at least high school level. I failed miserably and am lucky that I still have the tires on my car.

Then I tried to be my own stockbroker. Read lots of magazines, books and perused the Internet. I took the plunge and invested-money-my money-my hard earned, quickly dwindling money.

And when I leaped out my one-story window when the market dropped 500 points, I only bruised my ego.

Not working appears to be a very seductive proposition. You do what you want, when you want. You write that great American novel, you keep your house really clean, you do yard work, your files are totally organized and bills are paid on time. You have time to go to lunch with friends and send birthday cards. But somehow none of that happened. Your body starts to grow in many different directions. Your mind starts to atrophy, and by the time someone comes to visit you you've become one of those creatures on the X-files - a slimy, unable to communicate slug. At least David Ducoveny appears at the door to investigate.

Ode to Slim

Slim is dying. He doesn't realize it, but I live with that knowledge everyday. I see his brain and heart telling him he can still run, and his legs attempting to complete the message by flopping out in directions that make running impossible. I see him struggling to totter out and greet my return, determination focused, legs unfocused. One day he'll wake up and his legs will be unable to support him, and then I'll have to let him go.

Until then we are remembering and loving. Remembering the first big wide smile five years ago, as he stood in his crate begging me to chose him as my own. Remembering his inability to do anything slowly, as he only had two gears, fast and faster, and he would take every staircase as if it was a race to the top. Remembering the fields he'd run and run in and when I'd call he'd return to the closest guy, not yet determined to respond to a woman. Remembering the day a swallow swooped down and caught his eye. Slim took up the chase, and the swallow complied by staying eye level, and they raced back and forth and back and forth on an open field. The bird reveling in leading the chase, Slim stretched out determined to win.

Remembering the carousing on beaches, feet lifted high in water. His attempt (OK, my attempt) to get him to swim when I took him over his head, turned him to shore, and he valiantly dog paddled, until his lack of fat and hence buoyancy, caused him to slowly roll on his side, still desperately dog paddling for dry land.

Remembering our cross country trip. Which he spent standing up in the back of the pick-up cab so as not to miss a thing. His constant whining told me what he found interesting and what he did not. At night he'd lay across my legs on top of my sleeping bag and steal my pillows whenever I got up. He was a boy who couldn't stand to be left alone, but he also didn't want to listen to no stinkin' woman, and he strongly felt he didn't need no stinkin' leashes. My go-go kind of guy, gotta move, gotta smell, gotta check it all out and gotta do it on his own. He taught me to learn to let go, and let him be who he was, and soon I will have to make the ultimate let go - the decision to let him go forever.

This decision is bereft of power. It's all about sadness. The sadness is mine because we have shared and loved and it's time for him to move on. And everyday I wake up next to him, and it's

the first thought I have. Can he struggle up, can he walk, will this be the day? And everyday is the day. And no day will be the day. Because Slim is dying, and I will have to let him go.

Addendum: Slim underwent spinal neck surgery, and though it was felt the surgery went technically well, he never regained use of his legs. He left me for Doggie Heaven on September 15, 1997.

Here's a story I submitted to *Chicken Soup for the Pet Lover's Soul*. It made it to the manuscript, though that doesn't mean it will be chosen. But it's a nice thing to think about.

THE LIFE YOU SAVE

I was on the fast track. Corporate America. A world where possessions, titles and salary meant everything. A domain of black or white, win or lose, live or die. And it was a track that was slowly killing my spirit. I knew I had to do something-drastic.

So I sold my house in Connecticut, my Volkswagen convertible, an antique brass bed, three closets of designer clothes, forty-seven pairs of high heels and a life-size carousel horse. I chucked it all to buy a sixteen foot camper trailer and a 1½ ton Chevy pickup truck. Then I hit the road, heading west with my faithful companion, a ex-racing greyhound named Slim. I was looking for a better way of life. For me that meant someplace where I could have land and freedom. Land to rescue other ex-racing greyhounds, and freedom to rekindle my spirit, while helping the dogs to find their true spirits as well. I did not want to settle for a life less than extraordinary. I wanted to do some good, someplace, for something or someone.

Within a year of leaving Connecticut, I had a real job, though I was seldom at it. Instead, I'd founded the Greyhound Gang, a tax-exempt, non-profit organization dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation and adoption of ex-racing greyhounds. I would drive up to eleven hours to load up my car with greyhounds whose lives others would forfeit with no remorse. I would then nurse them back to health, and teach them the art of living, playing and being. Eventually, they would go to other's homes, possessing a piece of my heart.

At present, I have seven ex-racing greyhounds in my 900 sq. foot home. All fresh off the track and new to the luxury of a couch, carpet and car. The first few nights, we get a minimum of sleep. Their thoughts are clearly heard. 'Is she still there? What is that she's sleeping on? That looks comfortable-maybe I'll try it! Can you believe what we lucked in to? I just can't believe it. We've got to check it out again. Wake her up, make sure she's real!' It's hard to tune them out, they are so insistent and curious these first few days. And the results-

There's the smiles once they trust you. There's the wag of tails, or their heads on your shoulder that melt your heart. There's the first time they pick up a stuffed toy and thrown it in the air, only to chase it and do it again. There's the romping around the property, leaping over sage,

just for the joy of it. There's the jockeying for position in the bedroom as they all feel a need to sleep near me. There's the snooping around in the bathroom, the viewing of their image in the TV, the smelling of all in the refrigerator.

They look at you with such trust and such expectation. 'You are going to take care of me. This is a great place. All the food I want, all the freedom I want, all the places to sleep I could want.' And they love so unconditionally. It's such a great way to spend my day. In the company of greyhounds.

Our days settle into this: I sit working on my computer, surrounded by dogs. On one couch, Injun is upside down, legs splayed upward. On another couch, my girl, Beauty, has wrapped herself into a ball nestled among the pillows there. The sleeping bag is another nest, with Yukon inside. The bed is the province of Slim, my 8 year old original 'rescue' dog. The others are all in various positions of repose.

And though they look like they're fast asleep, they're not. They're really just waiting for me to make a minute move from my chair. When I do, they'll be all around me, jumping and hopping and hoping that we are going to go somewhere. Anywhere. Just as long as they can come. And they never let me get out of taking them.

They invariably know when it's not just errands, but rather a walk. Of course, they always hope it's a walk, even when I say errands. They trust I'll change my mind, and usually I do. So, we drive down a red sandy road, into a boxed, waterfall canyon, lined with sage and juniper. They pile out of the car, and stumble over each other in their eagerness to go, to do, to be. They hit the ground running, in all different directions. Some up the hill, some on the golf course, some down the road. And then as I yell their names, they all turn and run back to me, and then it's off on the dirt road together we go. All start with an extended trot. Just moving, just going, no destination known, just anywhere. Beauty stays by my side. But she's not complacent. She looking; in all directions. For a tale-tell movement that signals something to chase. She's not particular. Lizards are just as much fun as rabbits. And that tumbleweed, it's moving along at a nice clip too.

But the boys, they are off adventuring. I call, and they stop. Running back to me, saying 'I'm here, I can see you. I'm OK.' Expressing their joy with wiggles and yips and bites and laughter. They touch me, turn and are gone again. Moving and looking. No moss under those feet. I maintain my pace, walking the four miles, surrounded by my loves. Our spirits are intact and alive, and so full of our freedom that we all break into a run. We are beaming and laughing, leaping and cavorting, heavenward, always heavenward-all on a totally new track. And the life I save is really my own.

Here's what I did this summer. River Musing Drafts.

The river. Not just any river. The Colorado River. The Colorado River that formed the Grand Canyon. I just got off this river. Eight days on a silver rubber raft meandering through steep red walls, hanging on through wet deep rapids.

A river ride, a relationship ride. There's that first rush of overall beauty, lust and infatuation - when the boat plows through the water, spray flying, granite walls soaring. The high, the beginning when you jump into it feet first. Everything, just everything perfect and there for you - the falcons, the juniper, the rocks. Nothing out of place, nothing jars the fantastical image, the perfection. The noise of motor and your heart keeping time.

And as the days, weeks, months pass, it's inevitable that you begin to drift along, gazing at the scenery, barely seeing the minute detail. It's as if a haze of gauze has descended and muted all that was grand and beautiful.

And sometime, later, within your unfocus, you spot movement on a cliff. And your eyes reopen, and what you've been drifting in sharpens in light. You look more intently at the world you've been gazing at, but not really seeing. And you find that it still has the ability to surprise. That it's the smaller pieces that make up the beauty of the bigger whole, it's the smaller pieces that are the foundation that any relationship exists and subsists on. It's the minute interactions of cactus and rock, lizard and falcon, touch and look, water and life.

*Lizards, freeze, blend
in, not a scale moving.*

*Look away. They're gone -
not a crawl, but a glide, a slide, blending, melding.*

*I am sand.
I am rock.
I am.*

*But I'm not. Invisible. Stopped. Observing.
This piece of the universe revolves, evolves
rock and rolled.*

So we rock and roll into 1998. Pretty amazing. And I am thankful that I had and continue to have lots of love in my life. Wishing you all love, love, and more love. And when you wish upon a star-may all your dreams come true.

Chapter Seventeen

January 1999

1999. Wow. 45. Wow. 140 lbs. Wow. Numbers, just numbers I tell myself. Nothing to get silly about. Nothing to get wigged out about. Nothing to even really think a lot about. Right. Here's what I've been thinking about a lot - you know, that LOVE and DOG thing. Nice to talk to you guys again - I've missed writing. Truly hope all are well and happy. Being alive is good. Enjoying being alive is even better. Come visit and enjoy it!

Cleaning

I feel stalled. Paddling upstream. Under the covers and not getting out. I decided that if I could clean my home, I mean really clean my home, then maybe I could get my life in gear.

So I started with the dog room. This room houses all their food, paraphernalia, crates and my liquor stash. I started with the beer, went to the scotch and messed up the floor even worse. And then it was on my hands and knees scrub, scrub and scrub some more. The floor is actually a different color. Ten more times and it should be back to the original sheen.

So then I proceeded to the kitchen floor. First I had run out of floor cleaner, so I went through the bottom of the sink cabinet, and found a variety of items to pour on the floor. So I pour all this on the floor, get the mop ready, start applying pressure from the mop to the floor -and break the mop.

So it's back on my hands and knees scrub, scrub, scrub.

This takes hours. And somehow within 24 hours the house gets messy again. Go figure.

Goals.

I need new goals. I came out here five years ago, with goals of a quieter life, surrounded by greyhounds needing rescue. Those goals have been met. And the only goal I've had for the past year or so was to tie my life up with this man's. And I need to move from this space, and I keep leaping off cliffs, trying to get away, yet I always land right back on this spot. This stuck spot. This spot surrounded with so many expectations, I can't even dig my way up and out of them. I can't separate staying and going. I have lost my center in the whirling of love and hurt and expectations.

Storms

Outside, tonight's storm clatters against windowpanes, insisting to let in its destruction. Inside, my storm rages. A tornado whirling on its own axis, no where to go, nothing to destroy. I whirl

and whip and make lots of noise, and spin over and over. I want to lash out; I want to hurt someone, something.

And the fury rages outside, and my insides are churning. I'm not scared of thunder, but I am scared of living my life alone. And I was alone for so long, and then I opened Pandora's box, and I let love in. And love raged and churned, and then it regurgitated itself, and I'm spent and alone again. When I had only me, myself and I, I was never lonely.

It is so hard to not call him. He's only 5 minutes away in real distance, but in emotional distance he's on the moon. Fly to the moon, June. I've always loved the moon. I used to sit, with my afghan, Jezebel, on the beach, under the moon. We would stare at the moon's rays and feel that one night, we would get zapped up on those rays, and fly to the moon, June. It makes no sense. But then love never has and never will.

Where does Love go

Where does love go? Does it dry up like the tears you can no longer shed? Does it go into hibernation like the man-eating grizzly bear? Does it bury itself deep in your psyche, hiding and waiting? Is there a big black hole where unrequited love is swirling and churning, just waiting to be spit out?

And I read this and I say - oh Claudia, your friends will think you are so sad. But I'm not so sad. I'm actually good. Actually very good. You know me by now, I just think about stuff a lot. I have a really good life. I do what I want when I want. I make a difference in people's lives, but I still struggle with those expectations for me. Great Expectations. I have had them throughout my life. But having great expectations for me means I also have great expectations for everyone who enters my life. And that can be a bitch - for me and the people involved.

It's not like you just stop loving, and poof it's over. I've always had trouble with letting go. How does it stop, the memories, the love, the desire, the need? I've kept the size 4 prom dress, the stub from my first rock concert with James Taylor, Floppy, the stuffed animal I've had since I was three, my blankie. These are tangible memories, not something fleeting. And I can't let love be fleeting either. I want it to stay, to be with me forever.

Love is so special, such a gift. I remember when it came to me, not softly, but more of a wham, bang, let me slap you in the face with it, thank you mam. I, in return, screamed, yelled and cried from the sheer joy of this kind of love being back in my life. How nice to be loved, and told so and felt so. To feel that someone wants to be with you, and wants to love you and wants a piece of you.

Without love, my life feels on hold. I drift through it, doing things, having fun, pretending to be - but I am really just waiting. Waiting for that adrenalin rush, that chocolate high and the frantic pumping of my heart - to tell me it's here again.

The heart is an amazing muscle. There's all that anatomical, physiological science like blood flowing through and sustenance of life - but what interests me is how big the heart is, and how big its capacity for love is. I want to be known - 'Her heart was so big. She had heart. She thought her heart would burst.'

Burst because of too much love. Or burst because of love gone. Either way a burst. Either way a destruction of the heart. Not a building up of the heart. Why don't they say - 'her heart was so full of love, it turned redder and brighter and became two hearts.' It doesn't have to burst, does it? Burst implies death. So are we saying that too much love and too little love accomplish the same thing - death?

For sure Love hurts, and it hurts in my heart - deep in the muscle, the pulsating, sinewy tissues of love. And I will miss this love, and I so don't want to give it up - but at what price. And love in all forms is such a gift, and how can I turn this gift away? And how can I not appreciate this gift when it took so long to find it again? And I feel adrift without this love.

But I make the effort to see love. It's in the gift of the blossom's soft unfolding. It's in the gift of a hug from friends. It's a daily gift from my greyhounds with their insistence on being touched, and touching me.

'Just love me for a few minutes, that is all I need - and I will love you back. I want you to pet me; I want to be with you. Where you are, that is where I am. And if you want to walk, I do too. And if you want to snuggle, than I do too. And if you want to be sad, I will be there with you, and let you wet my body and hug me tight and feel sad. I will always be there, because I love you, without words and without thought. My love never goes. And when you are no longer in my life, I will love others. But I will always remember you, for you have touched my heart.' Lessons from my dogs.

True Blue

He was born on a cold spring day in April almost 6 years ago. One of eight siblings, he came out of his mother's womb ready to run. Over 4000 years of breeding to chase anything that moved, was personified in Blue. As a puppy, he far outshone his siblings in his desire. If it moved, he chased it; and usually caught it. And if by chance he didn't catch it, he'd hunt and hunt for it, until he had to be forcibly brought in. He wasn't going to give up. From sun-up to sundown, while his siblings were tumbling and barking and playing with each other, Blue was scanning the horizon, forever looking for movement. He was born to sight.

The eight were all sent to the track together, but Blue was the most driven. His powerful, handsome body would flash around the track during training determined to catch the mechanical rabbit that raced just ahead of him. He had no stop button. There was no 'OK, I've done my job'. He was always chasing.

That chase took its toll. Blue raced, and raced well, making money for his owner for over three years. But it was never about the money to Blue. He never knew what was really on the line. He just knew that if it moved he had to chase it. And if he could, he would be there first to get it. Centuries of breeding, years of running.

And those years took their toll on his body. His last year of racing, his heart said the same to him everyday. 'I'll chase it, I'll get it. It's mine, I deserve it. I want it'. But his body couldn't keep up with his heart's commands. He dropped not one, but two muscles in his hind legs because his desire out shown his body's abilities. He'd hobble; he'd use his hips to propel himself. He'd do anything to keep his body moving, forward, searching. He wouldn't stop. But he had to stop. He'd be in his crate, standing, ready, whining about why he wasn't getting the call. Other dogs were being dressed, were being sent. He was good, he could do it. Just let him show everyone.

But that last year, seventeen starts and no firsts. Oh, a few seconds and thirds thrown in, but not what he'd used to be like. And the owner made the decision. He would be donated to the local vet school. There he'd be used as practice surgery for third year vet students. He'd be one of the 900 greyhounds donated that year and killed by pre-vet students who as doctors would have the motto 'First do no harm.'

Blue lay in the gray, sterile vet school kennels. It was quiet. Those kennels were always quiet. The dogs there knew; knew that something was not right. Knew that they weren't in a place that they would ever leave. Knew that there was nothing they could do about it. Blue was one of six that had a card on his door. The card that said he was slated to be cut and killed the next day.

To the end, all Blue was thinking about was that he really wanted to find something that moved, to catch it in his gaze and to put chase. He would often talk to the people he saw there, pacing his cell, telling them to give him just one more chance. It really was all he wanted. One vet student stopped to listen. She stopped and she looked at Blue, and she looked deep. She saw in him everything he'd been and everything he could still be. And she took him home.

To Blue, home is where the chase is. And where his heart is. He stays true to his nature whether it's the teddy bear or the monkey he's chasing. He has no time for the hobbling, the stiffness in his joints. He only has time for whatever is moving. Even in sleep, stretched long on the six-foot sofa, his heart speaks to this feet - at all times true - 'Move, chase, run, catch, chase'. True Blue, always and forever.

Dogs.

I am lucky. I have found my passion. It fills me up and is always a constant joy. It makes me feel like a good person. It is something I do without thinking. I breathe it. I sleep it. I am it. The Greyhound Gang.

My babies. They come. They go. And it gets harder, not easier. This summer, I decided I needed a second dog, and all of a sudden I had four more, and I couldn't let any of them go. So I drove the batch up to friends in Wyoming, hoping they'd love one. And they decided they could love two. And I cried the whole way home. I spent time trying to get greyhounds out of lab situations at Colorado State University, and succeeded in getting eight- Pumpkin, Mac, Golda, Honey, Chessie, Blue, Fred, Belle - living lives and not cut open on some table. But there were dozens more I couldn't get out.

And I keep trying to get publicity and money - for greyhounds. I won a contest on the Internet this year. No money, but 7 hours of filming, now condensed into 20 minutes of a 'Day In The Life'. Check it out at www.real.com/reallife. I'm hosting a Greyhound Gathering here in Kanab on May 1st and 2nd. There will be about 200 humans and hounds celebrating the wonders of greyhound adoption. And I'm still trying to get on Oprah or Rosie.

If you haven't made all your donations yet this year, and you'd like to donate to the Greyhound Gang, I am a 501 c 3 - totally tax-exempt, non-profit. And I can guarantee that every penny you give goes directly to the dogs. Not one penny for administrative costs - Every penny to the dogs. And if you have a utility vehicle or a van you are trading in, think about a donation to the Gang. My car has 200,000 rescue miles on it. Stories to tell, and lives saved. But I will need new wheels soon. And you, or a really rich, generous friend of yours can get the tax exemption and the knowledge that they did something that had a direct result on changing lives for the good.

All my financials are on my web site. Every dog that has been adopted out is on the web site. All the information you need to think about adopting a greyhound is on my web site. Visit it when you get a chance. Encourage your children to do a paper on greyhounds.

<http://www.greyhoundgang.com>.

Keep those hearts beating, and stay True. Wishing you Much Love every single day of your life.

Chapter Eighteen

November 99

Email

I am an email junkie.

My mom always told me I was a know it all, and finally I believe her. People write to me, asking me for advice about greyhounds, and I give it to them. That is what I am here for - to give the world the benefit of all my years of knowing it all. And what better way to do that than over email. My fingers tap, tap, tap, and I dispense truisms and junk mail and quips and poetry. They don't see me, they don't know me and I can be the know-it-all my mom always knew I was.

I have had tendonitis for a year now, and part of the reason I still have it is because I cannot not be on the computer looking for mail. I crave getting an email. I wake up in the morning, stumble to the computer, connect to my modem, and then download that mail. I sit, still in a sleep stupor, as it checks for mail and then says 'Receiving 1 of 10, then 2 of 10 and then 10 of ten, and the bell dings saying 'Mail completed'.

I am connecting all over the place, and my eyes are barely open. I quickly scan all the messages, going first to those that are sure to be the most interesting. I rapidly respond. The quicker I respond, the better chance then that person will write me back. And I will get another email. And the cycle of email continues.

What is my desire all about?

Since I have a Master's degree in Counseling, I feel imminently qualified to speak about my obsession.

I feel connected to the world when I get email. And I like to feel connected. Call it a female thing, call it an Italian thing, call it a Claudia thing, call it whatever you want to call it - connection is what I live for. So email allows me to be connected all the time. And it allows me to be a know-it-all, too, all the time.

It used to be that I would go to the post office once a day to get my surprises in snail mails. I actually have keys to three mailboxes, and I love collecting not only my mail, but my friends' mail too. What a kick - three mailboxes of mail to receive. Most people live their lives with just one box to open. I am luckier than that.

But email is so much more satisfying, definitely more addicting - and it makes me connected and happy.

So send me an email and make my day!

Shower Power

I so look forward to my showers.

I have my best thoughts in the shower. It clears me. It refreshes me. It engages my mind. I make good goals when I am showering. I straighten out my life when I'm showering. Everything is clear and wet when I am showering.

My shower is my haven. Once I am enclosed in those pristine white walls, I revel in the feel of the fragrant soap gel on my body - and then the water, hot and hard, washing the suds and yucky thoughts off. I can twirl and twirl over and over again in the shower, losing myself in the feel of water to skin. Losing myself to swirling thoughts. Time passes, skin turns wrinkly, my thoughts get clearer. I have to literally talk myself into leaving the shower. At some point, I tell myself it is time to turn off the water. And then I have to tell myself again to turn off the water. It's a difficult thing for me to do, stop my showers. Because once the water is off, the shower is over. But it is not just the ending of a shower, as the world comes back in focus. It is the reality of cold tile and dripping drops.

It is so much easier to be lost in the flow.

Getting over it

I know I wrote you that I had ended a relationship. Truth is I had ended it--and started it--about 50 times since we've last spoken. You know when you know in your gut, and you can tell yourself in your head that something is not right for you, but you cannot break from it emotionally? I have been on a roller coaster, tidal wave, crash me into a wall, ride for two years.

So, it is very late at night, and I'm in my insomniac mode. I hate that he can sleep and get on with his miserable, stinking life. And I am awake writing about him. I think I will write about love. Fill myself with love. Love makes the world go round.

Like remembering that first love - when you are in high school and a guy thinks you are cute. And you think you are fat and ugly. (like I wish I was that fat and ugly now!) And he starts hanging out at your locker. And you start watching for him in the hallways. And he says hello, and gives you a smile, and you think that you are just going to faint dead away in the hall. When your diary is filled with - "I saw xx today. he smiled and said hello." The first love - when that is all you need.

And the next love - When all your adolescent/adult juices are flowing and the desires you don't even know the names of appear, and they are all over you, all consuming. And you are pitched headlong into a wave, and you come up grasping and screaming and sinking and swimming - all at once.

And the fantasy love, where he does not even slightly resemble what you have made him into. But oh, he is so gorgeous to you, so unreal, so unattainable. And you created him - lock, stock and barrel.

And the one (or two, or three) you really made a fool out of yourself over. And you chased, and you ran, and you grabbed and you held - onto - for dear life. Yours more than his - but only in hindsight can you see that routine.

And I ask, would I change a thing? I wouldn't change the way I LOVE. Hard, fast, total. But I might change the WAY I love. Softer, slower, easier. And it might then stay and not go.

What I've Been Doing

A whole lot

I organized a 2-3 day event in Kanab in May called the Greyhound Gathering. It was a blast -- in hindsight.

About 120 humans and their 150 hounds descended on Kanab from all over the West, and even England for two days of walks and talks and good times with our hounds. Got good press, (read about it on my web site) made some good money for the Gang, and met many new greyhound friends. All ready gearing up for next year - May 13, 14 2000 - over 300 humans and hounds will be attending!

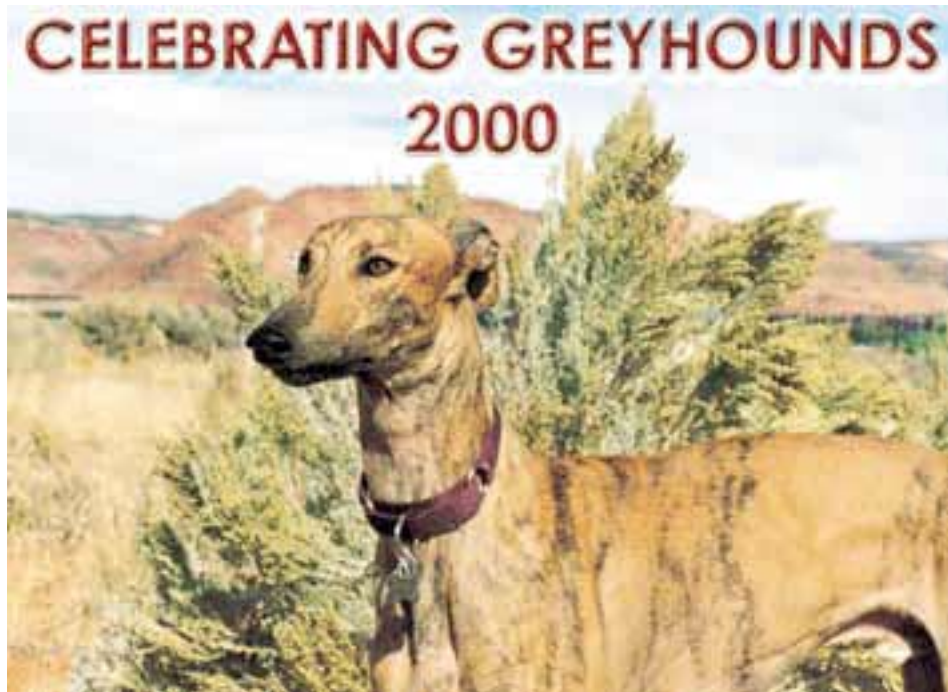
Web site totally redesigned. <http://www.greyhoundgang.com>. And I am very proud of it. It is superb, if I do say so myself. If you need anyone to design a site for you, this woman, Mik, who did mine is excellent. Quick, fun, easy and informative. Just like me! Been hatching new plans to make more money for the Gang. Offering sponsorships, insisting on \$200 donation per dog, finding Glucosamine and bottling it for the dogs, selling lots of goodies - some you might even like, like the temporary tattoos - so check them out the holidays are coming! And, as always - every penny you donate goes to the dogs! We'd love a donation if you'd love to send one!

Added onto my home. Did it for the wrong reasons, (ah, men-) but it has ended up being my favorite room in the house - my boudoir. I love to go in there and read, and enter my dream world. Bay window, sliding glass door, rustic stucco walls with old barn wood trim - lots of air and sun and outside feel. The room makes me feel warm and cocooned.

And my life is still all about the dogs. Bringing them out, fixing them up, and letting them go.

I still need some other goals. But every goal I start to think of deals with the dogs. Writing a book, that will get me on Oprah, is all about the dogs. Getting grant money is all for the dogs. Deciding where else I should move to and when, all for the dogs. Maybe I need to stay in the shower longer and get the goals made.

A photo of mine got chosen to be on the cover of the Celebrating Greyhounds 2000 Calendar. Big honor. If you'd like an autographed copy (from the dog, not me!) go to my web site - It's the hot seller this season!



I also entered two other photo contests with a photo of what else? - me and a dog - licking the same ice cream cone - don't groan - we were doing it from opposite sides. I could win \$100,000 in one international contest. Not holding my breath on that one.



Newest *Chicken Soup for the Pet Lover's Soul* - from thousands of entries, I made it to the final manuscript. They cut eight pages, and my story was in those eight pages. But the editor came to visit, and I made another friend.

No job to speak of. Don't ask. Don't know what I'm living on. Somehow my bank account keeps \$2000 in it, I'm starting to believe it is one of those bottomless magic bank accounts - \$2000, give or take a few \$, constantly in there.

Today I bought a vacuum. For the dogs. A real vacuum. Such a deal I got. A \$1400 vacuum that was only 6 months old, and I only paid \$350 for. Haven't even turned it on yet. Actually don't even know how to turn it on yet. Maybe I should read the manual tonight.

For Thanksgiving, I was supposed to go to LA. But I'm afraid car just wouldn't make it, and my dog sitter fell through, so I will be attempting for the first time - ever - to cook a turkey in the oven. I hope I will be alive after that adventure to come to Connecticut for Christmas. Love my Christmas in Connecticut.

This is my life - showers, and email and dogs. And I love it!

Hope your life is full of things that make you happy, too!

Come visit!

Claudia and the Gang

Chapter Nineteen

My Bedroom

I am home for the holidays.

I am sleeping in my old bedroom, with all my old memories.

They warm me to sleep at night, and alight on me at unexpected times.

Circa 1960

I have just seen the Crawling Eye. A Million Dollar Movie on Channel 5. Black and white. I'm in my bed and unable to close my eyes. Because if I close my eyes, then he will come get me. The Crawling Eye.

He was a mucousy, blobby shape. The kind of thing that comes out of your nose when you are sick, only a zillion times bigger with an eye in the middle. He eats humans to live. Just blobs over them, with slurpy noises and they are gone. He lives in the fog of a ski slope, and can take out a gondola of people.

Tonight he has moved to my closet. My parents have a fake wall in the closet behind the bureau. This space is where he has chosen to live. I put my black metal waste basket can in front of the closet door. I am a light sleeper and if he comes out of the back space, and opens the closet door, the metal basket will fall over, and make enough noise to wake me in time to get out of my bedroom alive.

Circa 1963

I am having a pajama party and we are all in my room communing with the Ouija Board. The plastic communicator is careening all over the place, trying to answer our questions before we have even asked them. And then we ask the question we should never ask of a Ouija Board, Do you have sex?. And suddenly there is loud crash against my bedroom window and we all run out and down the stairs screaming. My parents are besides themselves, as we try to describe what happened. Though we can't really tell them why. They would kill us, rather than have us talking about sex. My Dad goes outside, and there is a broken branch on the ground outside my window.

We all sleep in the living room that night. We are NOT going back into that bedroom. The ouija Board stays on the floor - abandoned.

Circa 1967

I have discovered that boys will break your heart. I am sitting on my multi-colored sample wall-to-wall rug, looking with longing out my window and crooning at the top of my lungs to - 'I Wanna Be Free' by the Monkees.

Circa 1970

I'm babysitting the brats, and my boyfriend is over, and we're up in my room. With the door closed, of course. And we are on the bed, and he keeps tirelessly trying to get his hands down my blouse, and I keep laughing and pushing him away and saying, 'Stop'. I know that good girls do not do that, and I am nothing if not a good girl.

Circa 1999

I am laying on my bed, looking out of my two-story window at the back yard. I am watching fat squirrels jump from tree limb to tree limb, as I look down on a yard whose smallness confuses me because once largeness roamed there. I see the cheerleaders practicing routines, as my pregnant mother brings out goodies. I see the badminton net, the crochet field, the hidden easter eggs. The years of running around in that yard - up and around, hide and seek. Seek and find. I see my rock. It is where I went to cry when my mother made me mad. I would bring Floppy, the two-foot long stuffed dog I would sleep with every night since I was three. I would hug him and wail. Sitting on that rock.

Addendum

This was the last chapter I wrote.

My mom died. The family house of 50 years was sold, demolished and a huge McMansion has taken its place. Dad moved to Florida. I snuck back on the property one visit back East and sat on my rock and wailed.