

*Wine comes in
six-packs*



Lisa M. Orban



Fall into the
LIFE
of author
LISA ORBAN



and her highly acclaimed book series
OKAY, PICTURE THIS...

A rare gem

I laughed, I cried and most of all, I FELT. Sorrow, joy and amusement in equal measure... Reading like a series of short stories with a lifetime arc, this is a book that was hard to put down and one I highly recommend. This is, above all, an honest book that doesn't spare the author or the reader.

This is a book like none other I've read.

Sandy Toes

Amazon Top 1000 Reviewer

A Fabulous Inspiration

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

Teresa Kandar

Author of, Heartbreak and Happiness

Creating Light

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

Tracy Knight

*author of, **The Astonished Eye***

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

This book tells us the author's life story. It is a story of resilience, of resurrection, of rising from one's own ashes, as well as a story of survival. But most significantly, it is a fun, addictive narrative. This is Lisa Orban's unique talent: she talks about her most miserable, heart-breaking memories, and still manages to put a smile on your face. From the very first chapters I felt connected to Lisa as a "character", I cared for her and felt the incessant need to find out what happened next to her, always wishing life gave her a break, but secretly knowing it would not be the case. Throughout the whole thing, I laughed, I cringed, and even felt a lump in my throat. I can only think of thanking Lisa for putting this together. I found myself constantly checking how far I was into the book, as I did not want it to end. Now I cannot wait to get my hands on her next one.

Marisa Ascota

Fell in Love with a Book Blog

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

Illinois born Lisa Orban has walked, run, been shoved through a wild beginning life and she is here to share that life with us. Not only does she write well (as though we are sitting next to her chatting) but she opens windows onto foster care, child abuse, domestic violence, teenager’ angst at what exactly is an ‘adult’ and yet mixes all of this grim reality into a memoir that is profoundly involving and moving – and entertaining and full of some zingers that will have you howling. This is not a book that is tidy to review: this is a book to experience, especially if the reader has no personal connection with the roughshod traipse through childhood that young adulthood Lisa has endured – and now manages to make us laugh with her (as well as try to overcome the desire to just give her a huge hug).

Grady Harp

HALL OF FAME TOP 100 REVIEWER & VINE VOICE

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

“It’ll Feel Better when it Quits Hurting”, which is good to know because you will be hurting. It’s not just the terrible tragedies and senseless injustices; you’ll also be hurting from laughing so hard, and then from the crazy antics, the keen wit, and the general hilarity of a teenaged rebel, who carries some of that with her into adulthood. Knowing the book is mostly autobiographical, I do feel a little guilty for laughing so much, but I think Lisa would want me to. While parts of the book are certainly dark and troubling, it’s never depressing. “It’ll Feel Better when it Quits Hurting” is oddly a feel-good, quirky, hilarious memoir about friendship and the triumph of the human spirit. Well written and very well done!

Cristel Orrand

Author of “Khayal” and “The Amalgamist”

Life Lessons

This isn't a story. It is the author's life. It is probably many people's lives. Parts of it were my life. The author has learned to use humor as much as she can and acceptance mixed with forgiveness for things that she can't change. It is not a hard book to read but, at the same time, it isn't easy. Throughout though you will be cheering Lisa on. She is a very likable person, (in the book. I don't know her personally.). She writes honestly, even if she doesn't look the best in every situation. I would recommend this book though I would suggest you make a few days for it. It is in my opinion a book you will read, reflect, read, reflect with. Some parts may be hard, depending on your own experiences with life. In the end though, it is worth it. Grab some coffee and settle in. I'm looking forward to her next book.

F. Christina

Alaskan Book Cafe

A decorative black and white border of a vine with leaves and small flowers, framing the text. The vine starts at the top left, goes down the left side, across the bottom, and up the right side, with a large knot at the top left and bottom right.

Lisa M. Orban

Okay, Picture this...
BOOK TWO

*Wine Comes
in Six-Packs*

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

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

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

AND

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



If you would like to connect with the author:

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Dear Reader,

For those of you who read my first book, *It'll Feel Better when it Quits Hurting*, hello again old friend. For my new Readers, welcome and I hope you enjoy it. Please be assured, although this is the second book in the series, they were each written to stand on their own, independent of my other books. I promise I will not leave you wandering through these pages wondering what is going on.

As I shared in my first book, while writing these memoirs, it was my intention to bring you the story of my life, not as someone looking back, but from my singular point of view, as it was happening. I tried not to foreshadow upcoming events, nor did I want to interject the present into the past. I wanted you, dear reader, to experience my life as I did, unknowing of the future, learning as I went, growing and maturing in each story. I am not always the hero of my narrative, I did not always make sound judgment calls, and I made some truly astounding mistakes. But life is like that for everyone, and it would not be an honest telling if I did not share the dark moments along with the light.

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

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

I would like to thank every person who read my first drafts and gave their honest feedback. My thanks to Alex, for his wonderful illustrations. To Cory, for helping me laugh when I wanted to cry. To Millie, who came to my rescue and helped me write the blurb and saved me from banging my head against the wall. To my family, and their support of my words, despite the fact at times my books are not always kind or flattering, and accepted my words for what they were, an honest account of my life that was never meant to be intentionally hurtful. To every person that has continued to encourage me to write, eager for the next installment, there is a special place in my heart for you, thank you. But most of all, I would like to thank you, dear Reader, for taking a chance on an Indie author. I realize that you have chosen to spend your hard-earned money, and precious time with me, and it is genuinely appreciated.

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

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

As I was engaged in this earnest activity, my teenaged daughter walked, much to her surprise, into being drafted to help me take the photos the following morning when my yard would be full of bright sunlight. (A terrible oversight on my part while nursing a slight wine hangover the next morning.) At first reluctant to help, she quickly changed her mind and jumped on board when I told her how much professional photos would cost me. (Never underestimate the power of teenaged self-interest when it comes to money) She agreed not only to help; she volunteered to get up before her usual at the crack of noon on the weekend.

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

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

And now, without further ado...

Wine Comes in Six-Packs ☺



Foreword

Michael Creed



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

Two months later...

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mike C.

Your Handy Guide to Finding the Stories

Introductions

[What the Reviewers are saying](#)

[Dedications](#)

[Connect to the Author](#)

[*Dear Reader*](#)

[*Foreword by Michael Creed*](#)

[Prologue](#)

[P.1 I want to be the Madame of a House of Ill-Repute](#)

[Chapter One - Hitting the Reset Button](#)

[1.1 To Suffer in Silence](#)

[1.2 A New Life](#)

[1.3 A Memory Returns](#)

[1.4 I just buy 'em a house](#)

1.5 Photograph in a Wallet

1.6 Dinner was good, but...

1.7 Keep Smoking Bitch!!!

1.8 Hey Bartender

Chapter Two - Erick

2.1 The Great Break-In

2.2 Third times the charm

2.3 Will you marry me???

2.4 Stepping into the World

2.5 Grave Dancing

2.6 The Wedding Gift

- 2.7 You're Grounded
- 2.8 The Request
- 2.9 Noah's Ark
- 2.10 The Accidental Divorce

Chapter Three - Mike

- 3.1 One this day, Nothing of any importance happened
- 3.2 Gone in 30 seconds
- 3.3 Bring us cigarettes & money!!!
- 3.4 I need more guy friends!!!
- 3.5 Take your shoes off!
- 3.6 You go Girl!
- 3.7 Nekid body, nekid body, nekid body...Damn!
- 3.8 Dear Season

Chapter Four - Don

- 4.1 A Bounty for Boba Fett
- 4.2 OMG! I'm white!
- 4.3 If you really loved me...
- 4.4 Reality Slaps a Winter Fantasy
- 4.5 The Blob
- 4.6 The Divorce Party or How to Break up in Style
- 4.7 Why didn't you tell me it was that easy?!
- 4.8 Since they Upped my Medication
- 4.9 I will walk you down the aisle and even sing at your wedding

Chapter Five - Shane

- 5.1 And the ex came back...
- 5.2 It's a Mystery
- 5.3 Look! Dinner AND a show!

- 5.4 ...and he finally went away
- 5.5 I only love you for your hair
- 5.6 Running Away
- 5.7 These two things I know
- 5.8 She's pregnant! You win!
- 5.9 Camptastrophe
- 5.10 Star 69
- 5.11 The Cold, Hard Facts of my Heart

Chapter Six - Billy

- 6.1 How Does Tuesday Sound?
- 6.2 To the Land of Lovers
- 6.3 Mission (Seemingly) Impossible
- 6.4 When it all went Bad
- 6.5 Mistakes were made...
- 6.6 Blessing the Bar
- 6.7 Husband in a Corner
- 6.8 Volunteering
- 6.9 With friends like this...
- 6.10 All Alone in the Night
- 6.11 Mailing B.O.B
- 6.12 Random Acts of Kindness
- 6.13 My very own Teddy Bear
- 6.14 Not with a Whimper, but with a Bang

Chapter Seven - Wearing an Edger Suit

- 7.1 And the cops came back, the very next day
- 7.2 Lurching to the Left, Pulling to the Right
- 7.3 We need a Miracle
- 7.4 And a good time was not had by all

7.5 A Second Chance

7.6 Failing to Yield

7.7 The Long Road

7.8 The Great Ring Fiasco

7.9 It was the bullet, not the gun

7.10 Have you found Jesus

7.11 For us, the living

7.12 Brother in a Bong

7.13 Wine Comes in Six-Packs

7.14 All Good Things Must Come to an End

Epilogue

Afterword from the Author

You are not Alone

About the Author



***You can be
right,
or you can be in a
relationship
and by god...
I'm gonna be right!***



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

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

Welcome to my roller coaster...



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



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

I didn't actually know per se what a Madame was, or what it meant to live that kind of life, but I did know it involved pretty dresses, expensive houses, and gentleman callers, not that I knew what a gentleman caller was either, other than someone who brought flowers and money. Since most of my knowledge of what a Madame was came from the endless Spaghetti Westerns my father watched on TV, it's easy to see how I formed a somewhat skewed view of what it really meant.

It was the most glamorous career I could think of at the age of twelve when the world felt awkward and so did I. Boys were mean, we were no longer young enough for the playground, but not old enough to date, and we all lived in a horrible never-never land of not quite. To be a Madame was to be the pinnacle of adulthood with all the glamor, power, beauty, and grace that can only be sustained in the mind of a child. Why would anyone want to do anything else, if a career such as this existed? Now that I am older I can look back at that childish image and smile, but at one time this was what I wanted to be more than anything else.

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

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

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

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

This is, in the end, a love story. You will not find any knights in shining armor, heroic rescues, or even a happily ever after at the end. It's going to get messy and nothing will be wrapped up in a neat little bow. Instead, you'll find confusion, sacrifice, poor choices, and heartbreak, along with

those moments of happiness, contentment, and joy that makes it all worth the risk. It's about raising children, going to work and going on vacations, and doing the household chores with someone you love (or don't). It's about small moments that build up into life changing events. It's about making mistakes and learning from them. It's about reaching out to another human being and hoping you'll find your soul mate when you do. This is my love story, but I think you may find a bit of your story here too somewhere within these pages.

So, take my hand and we can begin this journey together...



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

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

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

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

I lost almost everything in my escape. Taking only a few items we managed to salvage before leaving, packed into the ten boxes my mother mailed before our flight, to arrive sometime later in the week. Along with a few other miscellaneous necessities, stuffed into two suitcases, and taken with us on our flight, most of the space taken up with items I would need for the boys, and almost no space left over for me.

It was daunting.

And I was scared.

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

I had absolutely no idea.

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

Staying with my mother and her newest husband, I quickly realized I needed to find somewhere else to live. Moving away from her home when I

was 15, it was hard being a child in her house again after so many years of being an adult. Not a well-functioning adult of late, but still, an adult. I needed a place where I could start becoming what I had lost after years of dependence and abuse. With my mother, I would always be her child and treated as such. As much as she loved me, and was trying to help me, it was the last thing I needed if I was to become a functional human being again.

Although many of my friends from high school moved on to other places after graduation, my friend LeeAnn and her husband had returned to Quincy before my arrival. The local university offered her a full scholarship to continue her education, and they happily moved back to town after accepting it. Initially staying in campus housing, they decided after a year of cramped living in the dorms, to try to find a new place off campus with more room for the two of them.

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

I still didn't have a job and almost no hope of getting any support from Nev. I was still broke and dependent, but living with LeeAnn and Vern, at least, gave me a chance to try to figure out what to do with my life. Putting my life through the filter of reality, I knew my future was bleak if I did nothing. My education had stopped at graduating from high school, and Nev hadn't let me keep a job for any length of time while I lived in Phoenix, making my work history spotty at best, and a less than enticing employee for most employers. I needed to make changes to my life; I just didn't know where to begin, yet. But, moving in with LeeAnn gave me some breathing room to try, and that was more than I had before.

It was time to begin again.



To Suffer in Silence



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

Learning of my arrival from her son, almost as quickly as I stepped into town, Pat began contacting my family to advocate for her son and my return to Phoenix. At first, I objected to meeting with her, but after several months of persistent harassment, his mother finally managed to persuade me to change my mind. With a lot of misgivings, I conceded to her demands and agreed to meet with her in a public space.

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

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

Gazing coldly at each other, she eventually asked, "How have you been?"
Shrugging my shoulders, "Okay, I guess."

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

I didn't know how to respond to that. I had no plans of going back, ever. Slowly, pausing often, I described the downward spiral of my marriage to her. About the abuse, the bruises, how Nev controlled every aspect of my life, from what I ate to how I dressed, never allowing me to have money or able to move around freely towards the end.

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

"Huh?" Caught completely off-guard by her statement.

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

In disbelief, I blurted out, "You're kidding me, right?"

"No."

I looked this woman over, as if for the first time. She was not uneducated; she had a Ph.D. She had been successful during her life, with a well-paying career, only recently retired. She was not poor, both she and her husband had made a respectable amount of money in their lifetimes. I had no idea what to say to her statements. They were jarring, rolling around, echoing in my head as I sat in stunned amazement, looking at her.

"I'm sorry Pat." Quietly sitting back in the booth to put as much physical space between us as I could without leaving the table. "I can't do that. If I

go back, he will kill me. Maybe not right away, but it will happen. I will not suffer in silence for him, not anymore. I will not be going back. Ever."

"But you have to. He's your husband."

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

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

"You can't do that!" Pushing her way up from the booth to stand before me.

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

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



A New Life



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

This whole starting a new life thing was hard. I started with less three years ago when I moved to Phoenix, but I was also single, unencumbered by children and had a nice wad of cash to start my new life with from all the jobs I had taken in high school. Now, I was broke, with two small children depending on me and nowhere near the amount of confidence started out with at 18.

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

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

It wasn't the best place for me. Nothing had changed, but with no other options, and with a lot of misgivings, I returned to her home. Pouring over the newspapers every day for work, I found a fast food place willing to hire me. It wasn't a great job, but it was work, and that's what mattered. For a month, I saved every penny for the sole purpose of moving out on my own. When I was ready, I started searching through the newspapers and found an apartment big enough for me and the boys, within walking distance of work and within my limited price range. Signing the lease papers, the first time in a long time, I felt a faint whiff of independence and hope. I still owned almost no possessions, but at least I had a place I could call my own.

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

Taking a deep breath to settle my thumping heartbeat, I sat down in the middle of the floor and started thinking. Not just about now, as I was forced to for so many years as I struggled to survive Nev, or more recently as I dealt with leaving him, but about my future. What did I want out of life? Who did I want to be? And the answer was, I had no idea. Not a single inkling of where to go from there. I had lived in the now so much; I had forgotten how to think about the future. I had forgotten my own dreams, my own wants, during my time with Nev.

As the whole world of possibilities crashed down on me, I felt small under the weight of it all. Paralyzed by the idea of my own freedom. What if I messed up? What if I made a mistake? What if it was a mistake coming back to Quincy and giving up my life out in Phoenix? What if everything I had done was wrong and what if I continued to make the wrong choices?

Oh, god. What was I going to do now?

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

Working my way through my days, in fits and starts, I began filling my life. Starting with our immediate needs, I acquired furniture to sit on, and a bed to sleep in, no headboard or frame, but better than the blanket pallet I was sleeping on when I first moved in. A small black & white tv bought for the boys more than me, with only two channels, but I was getting there. Going to thrift stores, yard sales and swap meets, I bought things for my kitchen, a dresser for our clothes, a table to eat at. My place looked like a third-hand trinket shop, nothing matched, most of it old and threadbare, but it was mine.

But during my time with Nev, I had forgotten many things, like how to laugh, interact with people naturally, or make decisions on my own. Deciding what to pick from a menu would make me break out into a cold sweat. When out in public, I would find myself retreating inward when there were large groups of people around, whether they were close family or random strangers. I scanned for exits anywhere I went and positioned myself in any room with my back against the wall so I could watch every person, and no one could sneak up on me. Often feeling lost and alone, living more inside my head than I was in the real world. I barely tolerate physical contact, forcing myself to accept hugs and other small physical gestures, but people sensed my reluctance no matter how hard I tried to hide it. My behavior isolated me from the warm companionship I once so easily embraced before in my life, and I missed it desperately.

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

I started going to a counselor, but after seeing her a few times, I felt it was useless to continue going. She advised me I to forget what happened, move on, go back to the familiar and try to pick my life up from where it was before the abuse had started. But I had changed, my world had changed too much to go back to who I was before. I didn't even know who that person was anymore. And how was I supposed to forget something I still had nightmares about every night? Just put out of my mind something that controlled my every waking thought and action, how was I supposed to pretend my life had not happened, and just *move on*? And the answer was, I couldn't. Not yet, not with the pain still so raw it burned in restless waves through my mind.

I cried a lot, alone in my apartment, with only my sons to keep me company. Missing my old life, missing Nev, and hating myself for it. As hard as I was trying to get my life in order, it was just as quickly spiraling out of control as I sank deeper into depression and self-loathing. Stress and anxiety left me unable to sleep, staying awake sometimes for days at a time, and adding to my mental distress.

Months after returning from Phoenix, I was suffering through another a bout of insomnia. Another night of lying awake on my couch staring at my small black & white TV, and unable to sleep no matter how tired I felt. Resigning myself to yet another night of wakefulness. Listlessly looking at the TV without paying attention to what played across the screen, the programming turned to infomercials. With only two channels to choose from, and nothing worth watching on either one, it didn't matter anyway, I

just wanted the company of sound in the quiet of the night so I didn't feel so alone.

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

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

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

I didn't know exactly what I was going to do, but I did know what I didn't want to do anymore. This was not the life I wanted; this was not the life I wanted for my sons. I needed to change. I couldn't go back to the person I used to be, that person was a stranger to me now, and I wasn't even sure if I liked the person I had been. I didn't know who I was going to be, yet, but

I was not going to be as I had been before. I didn't want to be just another victim, living scared and hiding from the world for the rest of my life.

And so, I set out to change my life.

I started to think about going to college again. I had earned a scholarship while in high school from the University of Arizona, but with Nev's arrival in Phoenix and a new baby on the way, thoughts of going to college had been put aside. But now, I found myself thinking about it. With trembling hope, I applied to the community college in town, and they accepted me for fall classes. I didn't want to work in fast food all my life, and this was a means to get me to where I wanted to be. With my college acceptance letter tucked away waiting for fall classes to begin, I was beginning to have dreams of maybe getting a Ph.D. someday, life permitting. But for now, I was content to study hard and focus on gaining my Associates degree.

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

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

Looking around at all I had accomplished, I felt proud of all I had accomplished, so far removed from when I had first arrived. I was free,

perhaps for the first time in my life, to go out and make a huge mess of it.
All on my own...



A Memory Returns



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

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

"Hey! It's good to see you." A huge grin plastered across his face as he jogged over to me. "How have you been?"

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

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

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

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

"Yes, you were."

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

back home."

Still not comfortable talking about Nev, I tensed, then replied, "It didn't work out."

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

"I... uh," I wasn't sure what to say to that, equally torn between wanting to say yes, while simultaneously wanting to scream in his face to get away from me. It was a dilemma. So instead, I stood there like an idiot, staring down at my feet.

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

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

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

The last week of his visit was a sad/happy time. He came over every day, stayed every night and talked for hours about our lives, our mistakes and how much he had missed me after all this time. But as time slipped by, Billy started to push for us to resume our relationship where we left off. He wanted us to get married as soon as I divorced Nev, and move down to Panama with him. And I wasn't ready. Not for the intensity of the

relationship or to be married almost as quickly as I was divorced, and most definitely not to move to a foreign country surrounded by people I didn't know. Hell, I failed my Sophomore year of Spanish! After a year of classes, I couldn't say more than "please," "thank you," and ask for the time. I did not have the gift for languages that Billy did.

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

With Billy gone, I started spending more time with his family. Laura had never been happy with his marriage to Ali, and losing me as a daughter-in-law had been a large part of it. But with Billy and I back together, Laura and I could resume our interrupted relationship. Years before, I had not wanted to put Laura in an awkward situation between Billy and me, and so reluctantly, I had distanced myself from his family. But now, with our renewed relationship, I was warmly welcomed back as part of the family. Something I had very much missed.

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

Because I knew, marrying Billy meant an end to all the things I had been working towards, or at least, they would have to be put on hold. My plans to attend college in the fall, something I had dreamt of for so long, would

once again have to wait. My independence, something I treasured even as I groped for it, would have to be set aside in the new reality of "we." Like mist slipping through my fingers, I was once again losing myself in someone else's life. My resentment grew with the realization of everything I would have to give up to be with him. I wasn't ready for this, any of it. I had barely begun to rebuild my life, and now I was being asked to give it all away. To lose me, yet again, to become a we.

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

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

Becoming restless and beginning to dread his phone calls, I stopped smiling when the phone rang as my anxiety grew a little more every day. I didn't want to confront him with my fears, yet I knew I should. I waffled back and forth in an endless agony of indecision, unable, or unwilling, to stand up for myself against his enthusiasm. So instead, I took the coward's way out.

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

waited.

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

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

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

"I brought a friend home, I was lonely," ignoring Sap.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"No one, just my ex-boyfriend."



I just buy 'em a House



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

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

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

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

Walking through the door, I immediately knew we looked out of place in this seedy establishment. As silent eyes watched over half empty glasses, following our progress as we bellied up to the bar, I could almost feel their vague resentment at our entrance. If my mother was aware of it, she dismissed their unspoken disapproval at our intrusion into their world and waved over the bartender to order.

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

Staring down into my almost empty glass, I sighed as I watched the ice clink down in its newly uncovered state. As if drawn to that soft sound, the bartender returned, "Another?"

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

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

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

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

"Divorce." my mother answered.

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

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

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

I shrugged, not sure what to say or how to express the equal parts devastation and delight I was experiencing. The alcohol had been slowly chipping away at the hard ball of tension that had settled into my stomach before going into court. And as my anxiety diminished, I felt the first faint stirring of a smile, briefly sharing it with our storyteller.

Moving down to sit closer to us, he and my mother began exchanging stories, laughing as they did so. Looking over at me on occasion as they

swapped stories, and buying each other rounds, they continued to talk. I had little to say, but I enjoyed the feeling of being included while drinking whatever they put before me.

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

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

"Okay," Shrugging my agreement, willing to listen to whatever improbable tale he had to tell.

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

"I can imagine so," agreeing with him completely.

"So now, whenever I get that marrying urge again, I start looking around the bar for someone completely wrong for me, and I just buy 'em a house!"

Shaking my head and chuckling at his unusual, if improbable, solution.

"No, no..." waving both of his hands in front of me, "it's a perfect solution, I end up in exactly the same position I would have, without all the drama of the in between parts, leaving me the time to sit miserably happy in the bar without interruption."

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

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

***I hope you've enjoyed this preview of
Wine Comes in Six-Packs***