

# Out On a Limb

By Sandy McCune Westin

The snowstorm was blinding us all. As we made our way westward on I-80, I desperately latched onto the taillights of the car in front of me like an elephant grasping another's tail in a slow moving parade. Together we would make it through this winter nightmare in the Utah mountain pass and reach the blessed flat land of the Great Salt Lake or die together trying. The drive from Evanston, Wyoming to Salt Lake City should have taken no more than an hour and a half on a good day. This series of blizzards, however, had turned my solo adventure of moving from Boulder, Colorado, to the Bay Area to start my new life into an endless nightmare. My headlights were getting dimmer by the mile for some reason. I prayed they didn't go out entirely before I could get to a service garage to find the cause.

When I left Boulder that morning I had expected to pull into Utah with daylight to spare. I had spent the morning packing my small blue Dodge Dart with everything I could imagine needing. Bob, my soon-to-be-ex, offered to help with the packing on this, the last day of our four year marriage.

"Nope. Thanks anyway. I can manage," I assured both of us. If I was going to reboot my life, I reasoned, it was time to just rely on myself.

Returning to his basketball game on TV, Bob called over his shoulder, "Let me know when I can help bring the stuff back inside that won't fit." His smirky remark made me all that more determined.

An hour later, I stuck my head in the door and, feigning resignation, called out, "OK. I can use your help now." I couldn't suppress my own smirk when he stopped cold on the front porch, seeing just one floor lamp was left on the lawn. Everything else was squeezed into or on top of my small hatchback which was settled groaningly deep into its springs.

Our last goodbyes said, with reassurance from Bob that he would take care of all the monthly bills until I was on my feet, I pulled away from the curb. My brimming eyes were on the rear view mirror watching Bob as he watched me leave. I cried for twenty miles.

On the long, straight and dusty reach across Wyoming that afternoon, I reminded myself why this move was a good idea. My two sons were now young men, off on adventures of their own – one in college, one in a tentative first job. It was time for all three of us to make our own mistakes and successes. Although it was me who had tripped the chute lever, Bob and my breaking up was really a joint decision. When I had discovered he had been spending his days –

and nights – with his ex-girlfriend while I was out of the country on business, we had first each pulled into our shells.

After the initial anger and hurt had boiled down to a slow simmer, the day came for that long, honest talk. Another discovery had then emerged in myself: I was actually looking forward to taking this as an opportunity to leave everything behind in our small town and start working on new possibilities. No longer constrained by roles of Wife, Mother, Community Volunteer, or even struggling business owner, I could step out towards whatever might be next for me with a relatively clean slate.

As the sage brush and antelope sightings marked the miles along this cross-country drive, I had leaned forward, draping my arms around the steering wheel and played with my new prospects. A new friend in the Richmond District on the west edge of San Francisco would be welcoming me as a roommate. A brief acquaintance made while visiting in The Bay last fall had mentioned he was starting up a new enterprise and would be glad to have me come by to see how I might fit into his plans, so I already had a job prospect. I could hardly wait to make my way over that last ridge beyond Sacramento and see the shining Bay stretched out before me like fresh canvas just waiting for me to make my new mark on it.

But first I had to get there alive. The ponderous pace of the winter-bound traffic could not move faster than 30 miles an hour and not accidentally wind up in the snow-filled ditch. Every muscle in my body ached from the hours of tense driving. At last a snow splattered green sign loomed out of the night, barely visible in my dimmed headlights. With joy I read “Woodridge Terrace –Exit 1 mile”. A town at last!

As I staggered into the first motel room I could find, I glanced back at my sturdy little mule of a car. Usually a perky sky blue, it was now a pale ghost of itself, covered with salt and snow. The headlights had a coat of ice ranging from an inch thick on the outer rim to a pinpoint opening where the heat had pierced the hard, cold shield in the center. It needed a rest and thawing out as much as I did. I fell onto the bed, not even bothering to bring in a suitcase or shuck off my travel clothes. Sleep would come first. Tomorrow would take care of itself.

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