



Bear with me

*an adventure of finding life
when one has become lost*

by Wendy D. Bear

A Tale

Typical “photo post card Southern California day,” like any day anyone would expect in the land of sunshine and movie stars. The brilliant Malibu sun was warm to the skin in a most relaxing way. The skies were a spectacular blue with wisps of white cirrus clouds, looking like they were painted with a magical white oil based paint on a canvas of varying shades of blended blues.



A light breeze blew over the blue-green sea, ushering the unmistakable fragrance that could only come from the Pacific Ocean - the scent of salt and kelp. The waves were small, breaking onshore in a gentle, rolling manner — not at all like one would find in the winter season, when torrential storms would threaten the coastline with ferocious battering by the fierce energy of wind and water.

Overlooking the expanse of the Pacific Ocean, there was a sign posted nearby which said, 'Scenic View'. He wondered why signs were posted with such fervor. It was obvious to anyone with any

sense of vision that it was a “scenic view”. This locale was where Hollywood had filmed numerous cinematic epic scenes, as it was probably the most photogenic of locations when one wanted to create a shoreline for that ‘California look.’ It was known to give California its worldwide reputation of “heaven on earth”. He was a young man, physically, no more than his mid-thirties. Some would say he was handsome, although he never saw himself as anything more than ‘ordinary’. His dark hair and blue eyes used to earn him the title of “Elvis” when he was in high school as he had that ever-so-slight resemblance. It was a great way for the girls to tease him, as he would blush because he was so painfully shy.

Today, however, his eyes had turned gray and lifeless. They were almost as if that spark of life, which everyone has within, had vanished — just dull portals with nothing behind them. His smile wasn’t. In fact, his whole face looked “heavy,” lifeless, empty, old.

Today, he was not in his “old self”. While his body was standing, overlooking the magnificent view of the great Pacific, his thoughts and emotions were in other unreachable places, far, far away. He was in a place where only someone who had been living what one would call ‘hell on earth’.

The sunshine was warm, yet he felt an eerie coldness. The warm breeze from the sea was fresh and light, but he felt heavy and weighed down. Even the songs of the English Sparrows, which flew

around him, or the screeching of the seagulls were not heard by his heart. He was not here, overlooking the sea and its beauty. He was far, far away, in thought, in memory, in his misery.

He returned to his ruby red Corvette 427 convertible parked nearby, cranking the engine for nearly a minute, until it caught. (Such a moody car — mechanics could never figure out why it took so long to start. Defective starter? Who knows. It had a mind of its own, never following the desires of its driver on the first turn of the key. Almost like the personality of an imp, begging for attention.) When it finally started, he revved the engine, pulled back onto the macadam and continued his drive north on Pacific Coast Highway, throwing stones in his wake.

The only thing he knew was that it was time to leave that god-forsaken fantasy world that so many thought of as “heaven” – Los Angeles. What could people see in it? Mann’s Chinese Theater, while there are the many hand and foot prints of famous stars of the silver screen, was located in a run-down part of town, housing about as many homeless people as tourists who would visit there each year. It WASN’T the “glamour palace” it once was so many years ago.

While he drove northward at slightly over the posted speed limit, he thought, not about his driving, but what he could see what was left of his life. His answer, sadly, was that there was nothing. His life felt

empty - vacant. Even though he was successful in his job, he still missed the ingredients that made his life truly worth living. His wife had left him for another. Why? He couldn't answer it, except to know that somehow, he was at least 50% responsible. His parents had long since died due to health conditions that the doctors did not know how to cure. Damned western medicine.

He knew that marriage was not THE answer to happiness, but had learned in the two years since she left, that it was one of the “pieces of the pie” of his life — a segment that was supposed to make life “more fulfilling, more memorable”. Without that segment of his life in place, he felt incomplete. It was only today that he had realized that not having that 'slice' in his life was one of the all too many issues that had been eating away at him, both emotionally and physically.

He was an expert in his profession, but working as a media director did not seem to contribute anything to his life except exhaustion. He enjoyed his work, while he was working. The hours would “fly” as he would create his projects; his “masterpieces.” While they were never any epic films or other great artwork. The actual time performing his “miracles” as he used to call them, was play, not work. His only official recognition was a bronze - Third Place - in the Cindy Awards, given to media forms other than cinema.

He would be adrenalin-filled. If he were shooting a scene that would take most directors hours to set up and shoot, he would do it in a tenth of the time. It was a knack, his “magic touch” that allowed him to not just think how to create what he was doing, but a “feeling” that would allow the project to just “flow.” It was similar to the differences between a musician and someone who just played music. A person who played music would look at sheet music, and wherever the notes said to play that note, the person would play that note. A musician, on the other hand, could just look at the music and “feel” the music, hearing it, living it. When he or she would play it, it was not connecting the playing of that note with the dot on the paper, but the music was a being, a living, breathing spirit of love. The musician would cease to exist and the song would come alive within the instrument of that musician!

This is how he felt about how he created his projects. The movie or the multi-image show, the narration, the music score, whatever the project, became alive. IT told him how it should be. That feeling of watching it all come together, one breath at a time, was his magic — his energy — his LIFE!

When he was not working on any particular project, it was time for the political game in his work environment — the company. The boss was typical in his lack of tact. He would complain, using statements like, “That was nice work on that project last week, but what have you done for me today?” He grew to HATE the word

“but” as it erased anything and everything said before it. Anything said previously was preamble to “here comes another dagger” to the heart of the unsuspecting recipient of that poisonous phrase.

“My god, Boss! Some managers would show at least a grain of appreciation. For once in your stinking life, why don’t YOU try it,” he thought to himself, having saved the company’s ‘bacon,’ not once, but numerous times, by finishing his work ahead of schedule and all but once, under budget.

Some of his coworkers were much like the defense department contractors one reads about in the Los Angeles Times, sometimes running as much as five times over budget and months late on their particular projects! Yet, the others were getting promoted!

The demotion he received one year after starting the company by his boss was explained to him most uniquely. “Yes, your work is exemplary, and we have absolutely no complaints about your performance or talents. Instead of seeing this as a demotion, you should look at it as an ‘opportunity to grow!’”

He heard later that the company had a few people they needed to place somewhere within the division, as they wanted “highly educated” people heading up the departments. His “replacement” indeed had a higher degree than he, but knew absolutely nothing about either management or media production. And, politically, one

would not want to have a person with a Bachelor's degree IN the field of media production managing a department, while someone with a Master's degree in Public Relations was working under him. Oh, that would not look right in political circles, now, would it! It might show, somewhere in the corporate structure, that someone "higher up" did not know how to manage. "And we all know how important appearance is! After all, what might they say during the annual Christmas party!"

"Idiocy!" he yelled to himself, while driving northward, striking the steering wheel with the open palm of his hand. He didn't notice the increase in his speed, given the slight downhill grade on the four-lane highway. "Who am I? Nothing but the best pawn on the chessboard... but still a pawn!"

Along the side of Pacific Coast Highway, near the Canaan Dume Road turnoff, a mother, having just picked up her two highly energized children from the daycare center, was figuring out how to change the tire to her new Toyota Corolla, the 35th Anniversary edition. It was rare for this kind of car to have any problems, mechanically. However, having run over a large nail from a carpenter's truck, which had passed by ten minutes earlier, did not figure into the equation of "quality engineering."

"Mom" was trying to recall what her husband had said about how to operate this thing called a 'scissors jack', let alone where to put it

under the car. The irritation level for Mom was at the point of heaving the jack across the highway, into the sea. She knew she was going to be late dropping off the kids at her mother's house for the weekend. Her thoughts were on picking up her husband, who had been on a one-month business trip from the airport, for a much deserved weekend alone, given she could get this flat tire changed! Where is an auto club tow truck when you really need one?

Children are great examples of the gift of life, even, as this mother knew, on occasion, they did get out of hand; in fact downright mischievous at times. They were enough to test the patience of Job, so to speak, more times than not. This day was no exception.

Mom's children were excited about going to Grandma's for the weekend. Grandma loved to spoil them with wonderful new foods. They got to stay up later than they could at home, because "Grandma says it's okay!"

The two children were being typical for their age, complete with teasing, taunting, and just plain having fun. "Flat tire? No problem! Mom can fix it. She can do ANYTHING!"

The game of "Hide and Seek" inside the car was not so much fun, so in his own creative way, the young son opened the right back door quietly, so his older sister would not know he had found the best hiding place — next to Mom!

He crept quietly behind the car, where he heard his mother saying some words he was told never to utter. Stepping out into the quiet road, about three feet, he stopped, watching Mom trying to work this whatever it was. All he knew for sure is that it looked funny and it made Mom act kind of nervous or something. Imagine some piece of metal thing can make someone upset. Huh. It made her speak funny ways, made her face all red-like. She moved with a lot of jerking and tugging and pulling. Very strange machine, this “antichrist sent machine” — at least that is what Mom said it was. Personally, he thought it might be fun to try it on his tricycle when they got home.

The outraged driver of the red Corvette, driving north, was still not thinking of his driving, but focusing on his feelings of defeat in his miserable life. Anger was nearing the “rage” level. The “pressure cooker” was about to blow! IT’S JUST TOO MUCH!

As he sped over the crest of the hill, like a small flash of light, he noticed just a few meters ahead of him the red jacket of a little boy standing in the lane he was driving, near a car parked on the side of the road. He jerked the steering wheel hard to the left and barely missed the boy by mere centimeters.

Pulling off to the side of the road, braking hard to a skidding stop, the driver of the Corvette was trembling in terror, knowing he had come within a hair’s width of killing a young life, yet another thing

in his life to go wrong that day. Hot sweat ran profusely down his forehead, pouring into his eyes, burning like acid, and then running down his cheeks. But the stinging of the salt water in his eyes was not important. It was time to go into the “action” mode. Get back to where the boy was, NOW!

Heart racing, he leapt from his car and ran back to the disabled car, the child and mother, to make sure everyone was okay. Both mother and son were fine, but shaken. The little boy’s sister was not even aware anything had happened as she was counting with her eyes closed in the back seat of the car, thinking the game was still in play. “Sixty-eight, sixty-nine, sixty-ten!”

After a few moments, after everyone settled down a bit, confirming everyone was okay, the man helped the young mother to change her tire, apologizing profusely the entire time. The mother was most understanding, begging forgiveness for not watching out for her kids better. It was a “stalemate of apologies.” Nobody could win the argument of who was more wrong, but in truth, all were fine, given the circumstances. When the tire was changed, the mother drove off with the kids and the spare tire in place.

The man returned to his car.

Chapter 2 - Buildup



He needed a stiff drink or a double dose of morphine, Thorazine, anything to calm himself down. Being unconscious would be fine! His nerves were at an all time condition of disrepair. The term “frazzled” did not even come close to explaining the feeling of ‘electrical short-circuiting’ that was happening throughout his body and especially his brain.

“How can this day get any worse?” he asked himself. In truth, he did not want to know the answer as he knew that there was no stopping this downward spiral he was feeling any time in the near future.

Continuing his drive north on PCH, his feelings unraveled. The stress of the day was just too much for him. He disappeared into a feeling of nothingness — a darkness of cold and shaky emptiness. “How about a leisurely drive off the road, down one of these 100 foot cliffs, and just, just end it all!” Anger and frustration created another sharp blow to the steering wheel with the palm of his right hand, made the wheel shudder violently, making the whole car shake as if it were being buffeted in a violent windstorm.

It also, finally, broke the dam of years of tears, held back by pride and shame, and memories of his parents telling him those ‘sacred words,’ “Big boys don’t cry!”

He drove along for another five, maybe ten minutes. In the daze he was in, it was hard to say how long it had been. Time seemed unimportant, anyway, except that there was too much pain in this life to live another second.

“It was just too much! Life had been one big letdown after another. What a pattern! Why does ANYONE continue like this? You are born, you accomplish things only to be knocked down, and then do it all over again. Big deal. When you are a child, you have a pet. You learn about love, you become friends with it, and then it dies. You get a job, do your best, only to have some idiot tell you moronic statements like “you are too good to be promoted, so we are laying you off.”

“You do your best to love your parents, and they go away. This is life? Big deal! What a waste — happiness experienced, only to be let down. No, not let down, SLAMMED down into the emotional “dirt,” only to be ground in deeper by the boot heel of the next idiot who comes along who walks over you. I do NOT want, . . . no, . . . I CAN’T take any more of this! I have had it! No more!”

A few moments later, while looking for his ‘unique’ exit from this nightmare called life, he noticed, ahead on the right side of the road, a sign that said simply,



YOU ARE WELCOME HERE

Before he took his fateful swan dive off the PCH cliffs, he figured he would venture to see what this sign meant. One last fling in this disastrous life. On went the right turn signal.

Up the driveway he drove slowly. The path seemed to rise and go back about a quarter mile, where there were maybe six or seven one-story buildings of various shapes and size, built in a Spanish design. They were spaced out loosely, each one either facing the ocean or diagonal, facing south.

Between the buildings were gardens and grassy areas. Blazes of color from a multitude of flowers seemed to glow among the dark green foliage. In these “greenbelt” areas would be an occasional redwood gazebo, dotted here and there. The shrubbery was not new, but it did not grow above the ‘line of sight’ to disrupt the view of either the sea to the west or the mountains to the east.

There was a small stony path-like area in front of this “community” for lack of any better words, which appeared to lead to a parking lot that might hold up to ten or twelve cars. Not what one would expect from a locale that had such a beautiful vista of the ocean and such beautiful grounds. “What is this place?” he pondered continuously.

As he turned off and exited his car, he didn't even bother locking it. If someone wanted to steal it, that was good enough for him. They could have it. It's just one less thing to have to worry about. He was not going to need it as his life was finding this as his "grand finale" for his last day on earth. There was a walkway which entered the garden-like setting around these modern buildings. There were no signs but one, that was like the one he saw at the entrance of the driveway which, again, said,

YOU ARE WELCOME HERE

The gardens, he noticed, were manicured to perfection. There was one area with roses, with colors more brilliant than he had ever seen. Irises were in bloom in another area, which is odd as it was not the season for them to be in bloom. "They are early spring flowers," he told himself. Odd. Azaleas in one corner, Oleander in another. Throughout the grounds, there were small paths made of a soft material that resembled a cross between macadam and cork. It was black, yet it was soft, and quieted the hardest of heels of any step, whether it be barefoot or booted.

At intervals, he saw small benches, which were placed in the most "perfect" places, either with a most picturesque view of the sea and the flowers in the garden, or a view of the flowers with the background of the neighboring hills and mountains.

There was no litter to be found. The grounds were spotless, but not “antiseptic.” He had always hated the “sterile” gardens as it made him feel unwelcome. They were always “too perfect”. This was not the case here. There was almost a feeling of “warmth” here. Very, very strange.

As he started observing the wooden gazebos, he saw they had hanging clay pots, each cradling flowers or some form of greenery.

There were a few people, both men and women, walking around the grounds. Some were having subdued conversations, some just walking in silence. Others were gardening and tending to the flowers, soil and shrubs.

Most were wearing robe-like clothing, what one might say would be similar to what the Franciscan monks would have worn, as they were made of cotton or wool, or some sort of natural material, but the look was not quite the same. They were more colorful, but not gaudy. They had no “hood” draped behind them for which the Franciscan robes are known. And again, there were both men AND women wearing these robes. If they were not smiling, they had at least a look of a relaxed nature on their faces.

He noticed again, that any conversations were in carried on in subdued tones, as if they were being considerate, not only of other people, but also considerate of the flowers and the overall nature or

beauty of the place. This made no sense to him. How could, with all of the troubles and horrific things happening in the world, this place be so peaceful and serene? It felt unnatural, as it was “too perfect”. The world is chaos, entropy, not of peace. This is just “not right!”

Instead of the peace and serenity of this “Eden” calming him, he became more agitated, more unable to hold in his confusion and his anger. He walked out of the parking area, into the garden area and sat down inside one of the closest gazebos to regain his composure. God forbid if he were to lose control of his emotions in such a wonderful place as this. They would probably have him arrested for disturbing the peace, property damage and possibly assault — just one more thing to add to the eternally long list of things that seemed to be making his life “hell on earth.”

As he sat, he felt a pressure building deep within him. It was not in any particular part of his body, but from everywhere. It was building in his head, in his heart, in his lungs, in his stomach, deep, deep inside. He grew more and more tense, more confused, and the worst part, much more afraid.

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