

A young soldier in a green uniform with a backpack, holding a rifle, standing on a rocky ledge overlooking a valley. The background shows a vast landscape with green hills and a clear blue sky.

DIARY OF A VET'S WIFE

A Memoir

LOVING AND LIVING WITH POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

NANCY MACMILLAN



This true-life account of author Nancy MacMillan's marriage to the love of her life, a Vietnam vet, leads to unexpected consequences as he struggles with PTSD. Shattered by nightmares he doesn't recall and pain he refuses to share, she becomes entangled in a web of secrets and fear. Despite her paralyzing anxiety, the author's unyielding love for her warrior husband strengthens her desire to save him from self-destruction.

Diary of a Vet's Wife

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*Loving and Living with
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Diary of a Vet's Wife is a true story. The characters, settings and events are taken from personal journals and written in narrative nonfiction to the best of the author's recollection. To protect the privacy of certain individuals, fictitious names are sometimes used.

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I felt like I was going mad

July 3, 1990 - Northridge, California

Fear followed me home like a big black dog.

At five-thirty in the afternoon the scorching sun still reigned, yet the neighborhood was deserted, void of another living soul. Propping the screen door open with my knee, I struggled to get my key in the lock, juggling totes of groceries and my briefcase. My hand shook as the door opened. I glanced over my shoulder and slipped inside; my heart pounded against my ribs. Sliding the brass dead bolt into place, I slumped against the solid wood barrier as the stifling heat invaded my lungs.

"Thank you, God," I whispered.

Wide eyed and barely breathing, I searched the unnerving quiet that saturated the room. The house was empty—no blaring television or Brad Bishop, my laid-back landlord, usually slouched in his eyesore of a chair, the remote control embedded in his palm like some benign growth. Then I remembered. He was driving up to Big Bear right after work. It was the Fourth of July weekend, and fishing with his buddies was the one thing that could pry him away from his new, big-screened TV.

I was alone.

Slipping off my shoes, I padded down the hall to my room, trying to ignore the helpless feeling of doom pursuing me. Fear was now my constant companion.

I stopped at the doorway. Across the room the agitated red light on my answering machine demanded attention. My throat tightened. I knew who called and I knew he was drunk. I wanted to turn and run, but the pulsating red eye dragged me in like a riptide, across the carpet and around the bed. I hesitated at the nightstand, then reached out and pushed the playback button.

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"Nancy, this is Lorne." His voice was low, barely audible. "If you don't...if you don't really care if I live or die...why in the hell did you call 911 when I tried to commit suicide? I don't understand."

My heart stopped, I sank to the bed.

"Would you please come to my graveside...and tell me...goodbye?"

Tears spilled down my cheeks as his pain tore through me.

"Tell me that you...that you...tell me something! I need to talk to you...or you need to talk to me," he begged, his voice quivering. "I will die for you...if that's what you want...if that's the way I have to get," he paused, "right with you...then I will die for you. I will try tomorrow, July Fourth...to die on the Fourth of July for you. If you will just come to my graveside and tell me it's okay...tell me you love me...one...last...time. Just do that for me..."

"BEEP." The machine cut him off.

Lorne's desperate words exploded around me, ricocheting off the delicate green shamrocks in my wallpaper, crashing against my skull. He was my husband, the love of my life, but his drinking was killing him like it destroyed our marriage. He was teetering on the edge, and I was powerless to help him.

I buried my face in my hands, tears pooled in my palms. Monkey chatter swarmed the corridors of my mind. I pressed my fingertips into my temples, rotating them in a circular motion, trying to make the chatter go away. Some days I felt like I was going mad.

Three years earlier, Lorne had asked me to leave. He said I would be better off in a place of my own, admitting he could no longer handle the responsibility of living with another person.

I had no strength left to fight back.

When we separated he moved his belongings into our RV, but he would not leave me alone, calling at all hours of the night and showing up out of nowhere. Vivid images continued to consume me: Lorne wandering aimlessly, lost in his nightmare with alcohol, not knowing where to turn, except to me. I knew it wasn't my fault but I was drowning in guilt. How

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much more could I take? And, God forbid, would he really go through with it?

I fell to my knees beside the bed and made the sign of the cross. *"In the name of the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,"* I begged into folded hands. *"Please, dear God, don't give him the courage. In Jesus' name I ask. Amen."*

I knew Lorne wanted me back but he couldn't stop drinking. Too many years and too many promises had come and gone. No matter how much I loved him I couldn't go down with him. Threats of suicide loomed in the shadows, but there was nothing left to do. God knows I tried. Lorne knew me too well, he knew how much I loved him and he knew what buttons to push. In the past I had always gone back, but this time was different. This time I had to resist. I had to be strong even though I longed to run to him, hold him in my arms and tell him everything would be all right.

But everything was not all right.

Just last week he showed up outside my bedroom window in the middle of the night. I knew he was drunk. His persistent knocking broke the glass. Terrified, I cowered in the shadows in disbelief. The ruckus awoke the neighbors, and eventually he was hauled off in handcuffs like a common criminal.

The police warned me, "Don't see him or talk to him until the trial."

But I knew it wasn't what it looked like; Lorne loved me and would never hurt me. He was just trying to get my attention...that's all.

But now it was time to leave the house; it was no longer safe to stay alone. Lorne's pattern had changed. I went to the closet, pulled a suitcase down from the top shelf, and tossed it onto the bed. Adrenaline surged through my veins. Yanking open dresser drawers, I grabbed enough clothes for a few days and flung them at the suitcase, then scooped up my hair dryer and a handful of bottles and jars from the bathroom counter, jamming them into side pockets.

In the kitchen, I rifled through the Yellow Pages, feeling like a hunted animal with nowhere to hide. I slammed the book shut. I had to get out of the Valley but I couldn't think of where to go. The monkeys were shrieking

Nancy MacMillan

inside my head. I closed my eyes and rubbed my temples. Then I remembered a little motel tucked back off of the highway on my way to Point Dume.

The Malibu Hideaway...that's it.

I called information, then dialed the number they gave me.

"You're one lucky lady," the man remarked. "We're usually booked over a holiday weekend, but some guy just called with a cancellation."

"Great, I'll take it."

"And how many in your party?"

"Two," I replied impulsively.

Suddenly, the front door flung open.

"It's me," Brad hollered through the house. "I need my bait out of the refrigerator in the garage."

Visibly shaking, I went to tell him what had happened.

"Are you okay?" he asked, concern clouding his eyes. "Do you want me to go with you?"

"No, you made plans to go fishing," I hesitated. But I was grateful someone else knew what was going on. "I'll be fine as long as I'm far away from this house."

"No, I think it's better if you're not alone," he insisted. "Let me make a call, my duffel bags already in the car."

"Honest, I'll be all right," I reiterated

He may go looking for you, there's no need to take that risk," he stated. "Besides, there's safety in numbers."

The monkey chatter began to fade.



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