

This is about a man's epic love story and his courage as he faced death with the help of his family.

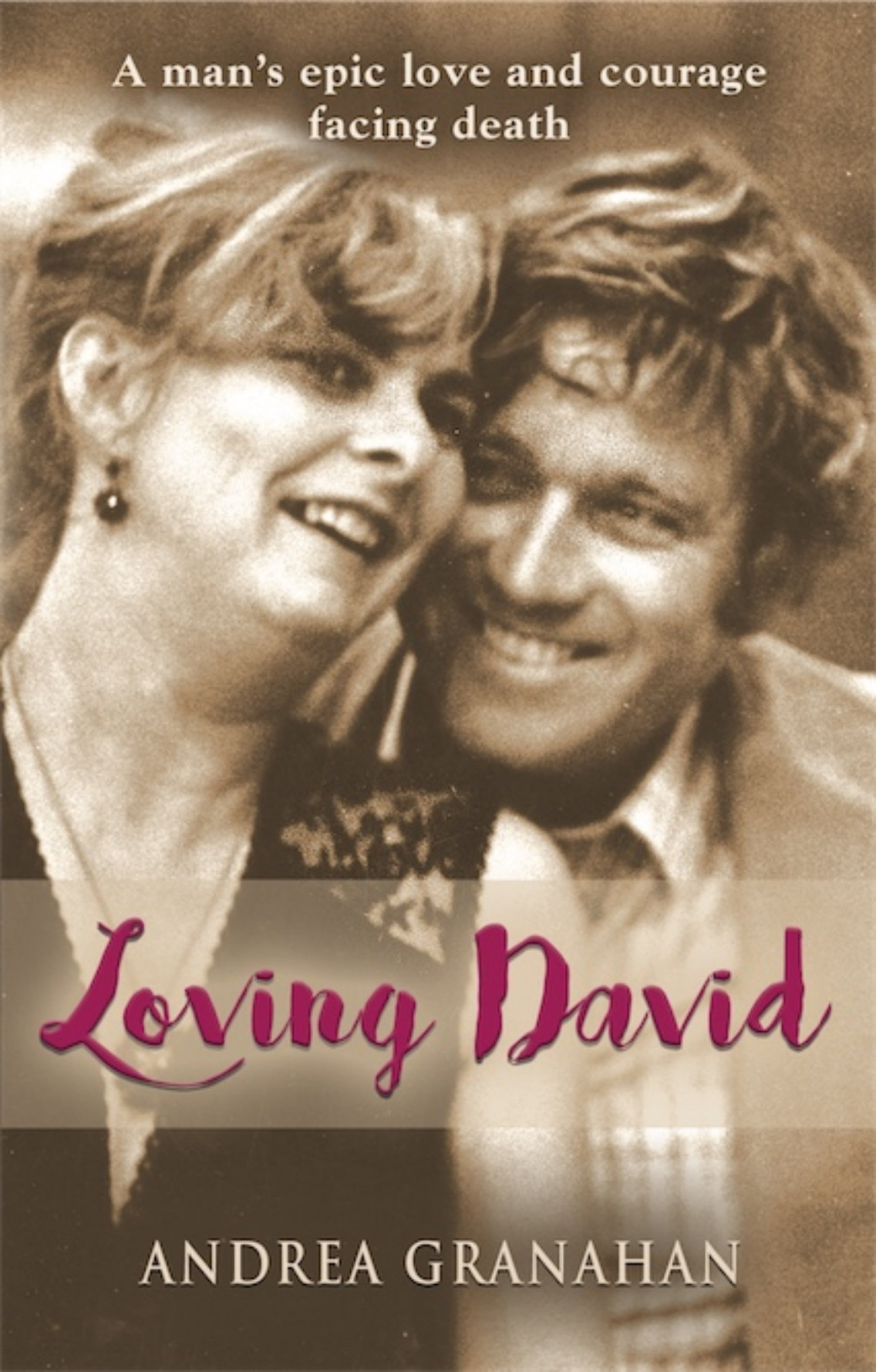
Loving David:

A man's epic love and his courage facing death

by Andrea Granahan

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A man's epic love and courage
facing death

Loving David

ANDREA GRANAHAH

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Chapter 1

Rage and Rubber Gloves

[Northern California with the Beast]

The Beast had turned me into a warlord, and I nurtured my rage. It made me stronger in the battle I must wage to save the man I loved. Right now, rage was building in me. I could feel it even while I docilely sat, waited, and comforted David the best I could.

I turned the pages of the magazine restlessly. The long narrow windows of the waiting room faced west, and I knew the ocean wasn't far, but all that was visible was a few rooftops. The landscape faded to a blankness before it reached the Pacific. The fog was moving in fast, and I wondered if that meant the drive north from San Francisco to home would be difficult. I glanced over at David.

He was leaning against the corner of the waiting room behind the bench we had claimed, his eyes closed. He's exhausted, I thought. My tall, handsome husband looked helpless, his strong shoulders now slumped and drawn in, his once blond hair gone replaced by a shaved skull.

Small wonder he's tired. You'd think that the doctors, of all people, would know how hard it would be for someone so ill to have to traipse back and forth from building to building before they could be admitted to a hospital.

What the hell is the matter with the people in charge of healing of all things, for God's sake! But as quickly as I had the thought I dismissed it. Useless anger. It got nothing accomplished. I'll save it for when it counts, I promised myself, like an argument with the health insurance company.

For a moment I smiled. I'm storing this. Boy, are you guys in for it next time. I mentally addressed a faceless and nameless insurance agent attempting to deny David something he needed.

A middle-aged couple with a young girl came in the room. The woman was wearing a comfortable looking sweat suit. She dressed for the occasion; she must be experienced at this. The woman nodded to me. I watched as the family knocked on the sliding glass window to attract the attention of the busy woman behind it, then learned, just as David and I had a while before, that the wait would be at least an hour, perhaps longer. The couple looked at each other and the man tossed his hands in the air as if to say, what can we do?

"Mommy, I get to pick out any toy I want right? Tonight, right? You promised," the girl whined anxiously.

She was tired, too, like David. She was obviously the patient. She wore a hat to cover a head that was probably bald or shaven and she had the moon face and pudgy body that came from long periods on the steroids they gave brain tumor patients.

"Honey, that's if we get out of here while the toy store is still open. Otherwise it will have to be a different day," the mother explained patiently. She tugged at the hem of her turquoise blue sweatshirt decisively. A familiar gesture I used often myself. Girding her loins, I thought, another warrior.

"But you said!" the girl pouted. "Didn't she Daddy?"

"Steffie, you just have to wait and see. It's not our fault the doctors are late." The father seemed the weariest of all, but he was gentle with his daughter. "I'm going to call the hotel and make sure they've got our reservations," he told his wife.

"Okay," the wife said. She knew, as I did, that he simply wanted to get away from the whining child and the

confinement of the small waiting room for a few minutes. We smiled at each other in acknowledgment as he left.

David stirred and mumbled. He could no longer speak coherently. He gestured to the clock and I realized he wanted to know how much longer this would take.

"There's an emergency surgery, honey. We'll be next, but it will be another hour. Then we have one more stop for the pre-admittance, the heart doctor. I'm sorry," I leaned forward to stroke his hand.

"But the water..." he looked anxious and pointed to the clock again.

"Are you thirsty?"

He shook his head impatiently, "The water, water..."

He had looked at the clock; I tried to figure what linked time and water. Running late, water, flow. I had it, traffic flow. "You are worried about traffic?"

He nodded in relief that I understood.

"Yes, we'll probably get caught in the rush hour traffic. Maybe you can sleep on the way back. Tomorrow will be easier. We don't have to get here until after rush hour is over. Just rest, hon."

He subsided and closed his eyes again. The woman looked at me with a question in her eyes.

"He's suffering from aphasia. He understands everything just can't find the words to say what he wants to say," I explained.

The aphasia was just as bad before the first surgery. It made the delays maddening. I pictured the tumor in his left temporal lobe growing by the minute. I looked back up at the clock and watched it for a full minute as the hand jumped ahead.

"I'm bored," the young girl announced. Amen, I thought.

As the woman pulled games from her tote bag to amuse the girl, I turned to my magazine. I saw an article about a new type of flooring that might interest my son who was a builder and I ripped it out to save for him. Normally I'd feel guilty about marring something that might serve another patient. I didn't today. I wanted to punish someone, anyone, for David's intolerable day.

I had also begun taking rubber gloves from the dispenser boxes whenever we were kept waiting too long in examination rooms. Cold storage, I had learned the nurses called it. Fifteen minutes was my limit before I began taking gloves, then one pair for each additional five minutes. I knew these "punishments" for David's disease were irrational but I didn't care. This battle afforded few enough satisfactions and stealing rubber gloves was one of them. It was like making the Beast, as I had learned to call the brain cancer, pay us a toll instead of the other way around. One doctor had kept us in cold storage so long I had gone home with eight pairs of gloves in my purse. At first David had been distressed to see his normally honest wife swiping something, then amused. He no longer even noticed. The collection of rubber gloves at home now filled a drawer.

"Are you here to see Dr. Bergen?" the woman ventured.

"Yes, and you?"

"Yes, Steffie needs another operation."

"What kind of tumor does she have?" I asked. There was no question that it was a brain tumor. Bergen was the best surgeon and the world came to this dreadful waiting room for no other reason. The mother told me. It was one of those hideous unpronounceable tumors that attacked children. I recognized its name from all the research I had done on the internet trying to learn about David's illness. It took longer to kill its victims than David's Beast, but it was just as

inexorable. Steffie would die young. She had been living with it since she was seven years old her mother told me. “She needs another surgery. Her fourth.”

“I don’t want to talk about it,” Steffie pouted.

Fair enough, I thought. She had probably spent the day being hauled from one waiting room to another just like David. She had been poked, prodded, stuck with needles and been miserable. So, the topic turned to where the family was from. At one point in the conversation I tried to include the child. She looked just prepubescent but behaved younger. Rather than try to guess, I asked Steffie how old she was.

“I’m seventeen,” the girl said proudly. I hid my shock and smiled but turned to the mother.

The woman nodded imperceptibly. “Yep, she had her seventeenth birthday not long ago,” she said in a cheerful tone that denied the look of sorrow on her face.

“I got a lot of balloons,” Steffie said. Her face lit up with the memory of a happy celebration.

The conversation subsided and I settled into my magazine again but was not really looking at it. Seventeen! At seventeen I worked and was going to college at night. At seventeen I married Jack. At seventeen I met David.

A deeper rage settled in. The Beast wasn’t satisfied with just stealing this child’s life, it had stolen her womanhood, too. All the vicious things it had done to her brain had turned what should be a young woman waking up to her own possibilities into a pudgy, whiney brat who made unreasonable demands on her parents. Parents who were willing to satisfy the demands because they knew she could not have the one thing she deserved, her own adulthood.

My rage against the Beast was useless. It was stealing my husband from me. But at least we’d had years of life together and it couldn’t take that away from us. Here it had taken

those years from a child. How many rubber gloves would I have to steal to balance books like that? Seventeen!

Chapter 10

Rich in Beauty *[Pennsylvania]*

Together at last, although the divorce hadn't come through yet, in essence we were newlyweds. Heather and Dave had also entered David's life turning him into a parent. He met us at the train station in Philadelphia with a great bouquet of wild sunflowers that he had picked that morning beside a highway. He had no way of knowing that they were my favorite flowers and would become even more so after that day.

To my surprise, the children who had never slept through a night since their birth, slept soundly that first night and almost every night afterwards except for the times they were ill. A great tension had left their lives.

While they slept, David and I did not. We had years to make up. I read him my favorite poems, he pulled out his art books and showed me his favorite works. We talked about all the books we had read that made an impression and told each other about all the things we had been doing over the five years during which we had been apart. We went to sleep reluctant to be parted from each other's presence even though we were physically touching. Awakening was always exciting because the one we loved was right there. We drank in each other like two thirsty camels.

I asked him what his art was for him. He thought quietly for a long time. "It's solving a problem, an aesthetic problem. Once I finish a piece, I have solved it."

That explained to me why he didn't have much attachment to his sculptures while his fellow art students treated their own work with great reverence. David told me when he had been told his old apartment was going to be torn down and he had to move, rather than move his large sculptures, he had tossed them out the window to let the wreckers deal with them.

David was in graduate school on scholarship at the University of Pennsylvania so we had very little money. I had left Jack with little more than the money for the train ticket.

"I've got \$27.41. That's not much of a dowry," I had said the second day we were together.

He looked in his pockets and answered, "I've got \$11.58. How shall we spend it all?"

I had opened the refrigerator and found nothing but a bottle of champagne and the remnants of a five pound bag of chicken gizzards.

"I like them because they are chewy," David explained. "At least I used to. I'm tired of them now."

"After eating all those, I'm not surprised," I laughed. "Groceries. We need cereal and milk. I'll buy flour, yeast and beans. We'll need carrots, they're cheap. That's a start." He had then laughed, but I was serious.

I am an artist's wife, but I am also a mother, so I'd better learn to cope, I told myself. It became the theme of our lives for a while. When I learned how much he liked beer, I took out my recipe for homebrew, and it became a family ritual for us to bottle the beer that cost us only a dime a quart to make. I baked our bread and stood in line at food giveaways that passed for public assistance at that time. Since my divorce wasn't final, we didn't qualify for any sort of welfare, but since we only had to make it through his last year of graduate

school, I thought of it as an adventure and sold the kids on the idea.

“Are we poor, Mommy?” Heather asked.

“We are rich in beauty like many people never even know, sweetie. Sometimes we have to eat a lot of oatmeal, but we are very, very rich.”

David had a friend, George, who admired his sculpture very much. He stopped by one day while the kids and I were eating oatmeal for lunch. He started talking about David’s work.

“He had a piece I loved at his old apartment. I wanted to buy it, but I didn’t have any money to offer then. Now I have great job. I wonder where it is,” he said.

“It’s probably been scrapped. He told me he threw the big pieces into the backyard rather than move them when the landlord told him they were going to tear the place down,” I replied.

George sat bolt upright. “They haven’t torn the place down. I saw it the other day. Can we go see if any of his work is still there?”

The kids and I rode in George’s car. Much to our glee we found the sculpture he liked along with a few other pieces in the backyard. We hauled the treasures home.

“Look, you guys can use some money. Let me buy the piece I like and pay you a hundred bucks a month until David’s out of school.”

The money was a godsend to us. David was astonished his sculpture was still there a year after he had discarded it. George and his wife invited us to dinner so we could see the piece properly set on a pedestal and proudly displayed.

David had his own adjusting to do. One day while he was playing with the children as I watched him from the porch

stairs, Dave, who was just a two-year old toddler, began to cry. David looked at me bewildered.

"I don't know what to do," he said helplessly.

"Pick him up and hug him," I answered. He did, and Dave hugged him back, stopped crying, and laughed eager to play again. I smiled as David looked at me triumphantly. A few minutes later he came over, grabbed my chin and kissed me, "I'm crazy about you," he told me. I beamed.

On Saturdays, the children's "candy day," we'd drive out to the country if we had the money for gas or when we couldn't afford the gas money, walk to a wild, forgotten graveyard where a stream meandered through the shrubs and weeds when we couldn't afford the gas money. We'd picnic and let the kids eat their little bag of treats.

The only thing that seemed to bother him was if the children bickered with each other. I hit on a solution. I would tell them they couldn't talk to each other for ten minutes, setting a kitchen timer, but they could make faces at each other. Inevitably, that set them off laughing at each other in just a couple minutes. It made David laugh, too. He hung up butcher paper around their beds so they could draw and paint and played their favorite songs on a recorder at night before they went to bed. He liked his new role as a dad.

He also liked being a husband. Our lust for each other was overpowering and at every opportunity we made love. Once when a fellow student was watching the children and we made love in a park by the river, David helped me up and grinning said, "Now we've made love on the east bank."

I burst out laughing, knowing he was planning on a tryst with me on the west bank as well.

Jack's parents came to visit us and the children, and I made it clear to them that I would never deny them contact with the kids. They relaxed and by the end of their visit had

grown fond of David. They could see he genuinely loved the kids.

“You and Jack fought so much,” was Judith’s comment. “Maybe it’s better this way. I sometimes wonder about his ability to get on with any woman.”

I called my mother to apprise her of what had happened. She was now remarried to a very respectable man and critical that David and I were living together before my divorce was final and at first tried to tell me if we came to visit, David and I would have to sleep in separate rooms.

“Mom, you can come see us and the children, and we will visit you, but we do it as a couple, otherwise we won’t visit now or afterwards.” I was firm and my mother extended an invitation without restrictions.

David expressed envy. “You don’t have to live up to any expectations with your parents.”

I had told him of my father’s death when I was a baby and my mother and stepfather’s tumultuous relationship.

In contrast, I was envious of his happy childhood. He told me about his parents taking him and his brothers out in the country on painting excursions, setting up each child with an easel and all five of them spending the afternoon painting and playing, and proudly hanging the art up when they got home. It seemed as exotic to me as a family spending a day sky-diving.

But I began to understand what he meant when we first met with his mother. After getting David’s bombshell of a letter announcing me and the children, David’s mother, Lolita, said she intended to keep the children and me secret from his father. David made it clear that he didn’t. This was his family now, he told her firmly. Lolita was hostile at first. After one visit I began to cry as we left his parent’s home. He

immediately pulled over to hold me and declared he would never go back again.

“No, these are your parents. We’ll get past it,” I sobbed.

Then I realized that Lolita thought that David had divorced Janet to be with me. It didn’t help that Jack and I named our son after David. Finally, on one visit as I was showing her pictures of the children as babies, I explained the real situation, David’s ex-wife’s infidelities, and also confessed that Jack had been faithless.

“Well, no wonder you two got together. You’d both been through hell,” Lolita said firmly, and hugged me.

From that moment on my new mother-in-law and I became friends. Besides Lolita could not resist the children, her first grandchildren. We began making regular trips south to the Maryland suburb of Washington DC to visit his parents as David plodded his way through his last year of school.

David worked on school vacations, I worked in stores at night for a few hours when David could watch the children. He sold some more of his sculpture. We eked out a living without any child support from Jack. Jack wrote at first and then didn’t.

We formed a friendship with one of David’s professors and his family. One day while we were there for dinner the man took advantage of a moment alone with me to say, “We were all very concerned for David when he told us that he was taking on a family, and turned down a Fulbright Fellowship to Italy because of it.”

“He turned down a Fulbright?” I hadn’t known.

“Yes. He is the most promising artist we’ve ever had in the sculpture school, and so there was concern about his career when he told us about you. I just want you to know that I’ve assured the rest of the staff that you are very good

for him. He's never been so happy. But you must make him put his art first always."

I nodded seriously. Once home I asked David about the Fulbright and why he hadn't mentioned it to me.

"It wasn't important. I couldn't be in Italy. When you left Jack, I had to be right here for you."

I was troubled, "But you gave up that chance for me. I don't ever want you to regret it."

"I'm not worried. Someday we'll go together or go someplace even neater."

Not long afterwards David brought home a copy of Henry Miller's "Colossus of Maroussi" a memoir of a trip to Greece. We read it aloud to each other. That decided us, "Greece. That's where we'll go. We'll save up and do it after school is finished."

Traveling became our dream. We got federal geophysical maps that were free, and wallpapered our apartment with them. On the ceiling we tacked up a map of the heavens.

Our professor friend told me that the only thing that troubled him about David was that he was so quiet, he worried he wouldn't be able to defend his work before the faculty when it was time to pass muster and get his master's degree. I assured him that when David wanted to speak he could and would.

I thought to myself about David in front of a group of people, like when we got together with friends. It's as if when he sets a table he clears off all his things to make room for theirs, I realized. He retreats so they will advance. When he does set something on the table everyone focuses on it because it is important – that one thing that he has offered.

David told me he had begun a new project at the school studio. "I'm making a rocking horse for the kids. It'll have two heads so they won't fight over who goes in front."

I learned a few months later that his rocking horse had caused a quiet furor at the university where opinion was split among his professors. Half thought anything not abstract was a waste of his time, the other half thought it was the best piece of sculpture to come out of the school in decades. The furor died down when he finished it and went on to make more abstract sculpture. It was a professor who was a friend who told me, not David. He had never known. He so clearly loved making the horse, no one on the faculty had the heart to tell him.

He brought the horse home to the great delight of the children who promptly each claimed one end as their very own, naming one Dandy and the other Polly.

“Oh, good, they like different ones,” sighed David in relief. He then told me that he had written love notes to Heather and little Dave and sealed them in the hollow interior. “In case there’s ever a flood and it comes unglued it won’t be a total loss.”

“I hope you wrote in indelible ink then,” I laughed.

At school the great master’s degree defense of his art came. His professor called me even before David came home saying, “I was afraid of him being able to pitch. He pitched like Mickey Mantle!” and he began laughing.

“What’s so funny?”

One guy asked him, “What determines the scale of your work?”

David told him, “The size of the door.”

Thus, David became an instant legend on campus.

We both were tired of the city. As he began a job search we were determined it would be out in a rural area. David, quiet and hard-working, was fed up with what he considered the pomposity of the art school.

“It’s all so much bull. I don’t want to teach because I don’t want to be around art schools any more. I’m sick to death of them.” He turned down two teaching positions offered him.

The other option for him if he wanted to keep working at his sculpture would be to find work with an already established artist as an assistant. He began sending out letters and putting out the word with his professors. Finally, word came that a sculptor in Maine was looking for help in constructing monumental sized pieces. David made a trip up to meet him.

He came back jubilant. “I got the job, and you are going to love this place. I even found us a place to live this summer. It’s in the carriage house of a huge old estate. There’s a sea view and it’s next to the woods. Hey kids, you are going to have great big yard and a forest and an ocean to play in.”

Chapter 15

Declaring War

[Northern California with the Beast]

“Hey, lawn junk on the left,” I sang out. David saw where I was pointing and turned in to the small lot filled with statuary. It was the third such place we had found that afternoon.

“Now that makes a statement!” I said pointing to a fountain that featured a giant snarling pig in its center.

“But what is it saying?” David laughed. “Insults?”

Back in the car we looked at each other, “The lion?” he said.

“The lion,” I replied. We went back to the first store we had visited the first day of the fountain hunt.

As we bore our trophy home, I felt a little regretful that we had ended our search. It had been such fun the last couple weeks. But at home as David took on the task of putting up an electric line I was happy to see him so pleased. There was so little he was still able to do. Usually he just directed me in what needed doing. This time he was able to take care of all the tasks involved in getting the spot ready for the fountain. We just had to wait for one of the boys to come and help me carry the heavy fountain itself from the car to the yard.

When it was installed, sending its cool watery music into the garden we celebrated by opening a bottle of champagne.

David was now allowed to enjoy a little alcohol. I had thought he’d want to go back to drinking the beer he used to so enjoy, but he had lost his taste for it. I was glad he could enjoy some wine occasionally. That and the never-ending

sweets were his new pleasures. The steroids he still had to take had provoked the craving for sugar. The craving had first appeared the first time he was hospitalized.

The surgeon had been so calm as he had pronounced David's death sentence as I waited outside the operating room. While the nurses finished getting David ready for the recovery room, he came and sat next to me.

"It's malignant. We were only able to get about half of it. He has to start radiation right away if he is to have any time at all."

My heart stopped for a moment but even as tears began rolling down my face, I was able to calmly ask, "How long does he have?"

"Usually with this type of tumor that has reached this size we give it two to seven months with the radiation. A few weeks if he doesn't have radiation."

I went blank with shock. I had been so convinced it had to be benign. I was so sure David and I had years together yet.

But David's immediate needs swallowed me up for the next three days as steroid psychosis had set in. While he was in the ICU unit I went home at night, but they released him from the ICU too soon and steroid psychosis set in. The doctors didn't recognize it for what it was. I wanted to stay with him when he was moved out of ICU but the male nurse assured me he would keep watch. I left my number in case of any emergency. At four a.m. the phone rang, and a different nurse told me David had injured himself yanking out a catheter. I instantly took off for the hospital and was horrified to find they had tied David to the bed.

"We're getting rid of this right now," I growled as I angrily untied his hands.

I announced at the nurses' station that I was going to stay with my husband to protect him from their inadequate care. "If you want to get rid of me, get him well!" I insisted.

They moved him back into the ICU unit for a few more days. Then they gave us a private room. Afraid we might sue them, they had provided a large sunny corner room for us. As cheerful as the room looked after the ICU room in the basement, I was too busy keeping up with David's restlessness to enjoy it, even though someone had sent flowers which the nurses had put into a vase for us and someone else had left a message that had been written on the white board on the wall in cheerful colors.

After three sleepless nights, they reduced David's steroid dose and he was finally able to get to sleep. Collapsing on to a cot the kids had brought in for me, I thought I would fall to sleep instantly. Instead as I lay there, my grief finally hit me. I had blocked it out with the necessity of tending David until now. Choking back any audible sounds so I wouldn't wake him now that he could finally sleep, I lay on the cot sobbing and hugging my legs to my belly in agony.

My life was upside-down. I could see it like a series of paths in front of me. Down one path lay nothing but more of this paralyzing fear and pain. Down another path I could see a struggle and time still left with David. Desperately, I began searching for a way to move from the one place to the other. I remembered a phrase from a time when I had read voraciously about Zen and Eastern mysticism ...monkey mind. "That's what I need to use, to put at my service right now, my monkey mind."

I got up from my cot and groped in the dark for a book the kids had brought me, a gothic mystery novel. Then I felt in my bag for the flashlight I had brought. The batteries were dead.

I got up and went to the nurses' station where the night shift was catching up on paper work.

"Have you got a flashlight I can borrow?" I asked. The male nurse on duty took one look at my tear-ravaged face and handed over his flashlight without a word. I returned to our room and under a blanket forced myself to read the first sentence of the book over and over again. Gradually, I made myself digest it word by word, over and over, until I could make sense of "Both sides of Lamb's Lane were strewn with a lacework of celandine and angel eyes, and a glossy blackbird showered the Hawthorne hedge with his courtship song". I felt the cold core of fear lessen its grip. When I finally relaxed enough to grasp the meaning of the entire sentence I fell asleep.

The next day I took charge of the illness. Confiscating the white board in the room for my own use, I began recording David's vital signs myself whenever a nurse took them. I made lists of his medications, times and amounts of doses. I questioned everything that they did so I could learn how to do it myself. I made a list of questions for the doctor.

I began making lists for each of the kids and their mates to hand out when they came to visit. A list of organizations and internet sites for Devin's wife Marlo to research, a shopping list for the groceries for Dave's wife Gayla, a list of business calls for young Dave to make, a list of relatives and friends for Heather to call, even a list of the lists. It gave me a comforting sense of some control returning to my life even though I knew it was illusionary.

David became lucid and finally asked about his prognosis. I cried when I told him but did not lose the icy calm I had managed to create for myself.

"That's what they say, but we are going to fight this," I promised him. "I will do everything I can to get information

for you so you can make the decisions. I'm not giving up and I don't want you to."

He seemed to accept the situation with his typical serenity. When his brother called him and David told him, he had to comfort his brother who was crying. "Well I'd rather have got brain cancer when I was eighty instead of sixty, but I am happy I didn't get it at twenty."

When he was off the phone he told me, "I know you will do everything that can be done. I can trust you to find out anything there is to learn."

"No stone unturned," I promised.

And thus, our battle with the Beast began with my declaration of war.

Chapter 27

Arrivals *[Coast to Coast]*

David was shaking my shoulder. I rolled over in the sleeping bag and yawned.

“What time is it?”

“Four-thirty,” he whispered, so he wouldn’t wake the kids. “I got up fifteen minutes ago and made some instant coffee if you want a cup.”

“Great. Just let me get my clothes on.”

As I dressed and rolled up the sleeping bags, he packed away the camp stove. Then we carried the children and tucked them into the little nest we had made for them in the back seat.

The Plymouth Valiant Judith and Meyer had given us rather than trade it in was so heavily loaded down that David jacked it up each night to relieve the weight on the springs. He lowered the car and put the jack back in its allotted slot in the trunk. Everything we owned was in the car including the doubled headed rocking horse, the life-sized sculpture of me and two more pieces of sculpture that hadn’t sold at his show. All that along with his tools was tied to the roof.

We didn’t dare go over thirty-five miles an hour so only used the back roads to travel across country. The little overloaded car was holding up just great.

We shared a cup of coffee before he started the car. The crickets were chirruping loudly in the Utah graveyard where we had camped the night before. It was a peaceful little out-of-the-way place and locals hadn’t seemed to mind that we

had set up camp at its perimeter. Like most graveyards it had a water spigot.

"I see a town just a few miles up the road. Maybe there's a cafe where we can have them fill the thermos with real coffee," I said using a flashlight to read the map.

We had set up this routine because it allowed us to make more progress on our trek across country without putting too much hardship on the kids. Back in Greece we had decided we wanted to live on the West Coast. Life was cheaper and more easy-going there, or so we hoped.

Borrowing bus fare from my stepfather we had traveled to Maryland to stay with David's parents while he had his one-man show. Our friend the freighter captain, true to his word, had delivered all our things to Baltimore. David and his brother had picked it up at the port.

Not wanting David's parents to know how broke we were, we asked Fred and Myra for an advance on the show sales, not much, just enough to pay for some craft supplies. I had promptly gone to work making hair ornaments and selling them to shops in Washington D.C.

Our old friends had welcomed us with open arms, entertaining us royally, and Judith and Meyer had flown out from Cleveland to see the children, now nine and seven years old. It was a great reunion for everyone and they capped it by offering us the car if David would just go to Cleveland to pick it up. It was a great home-coming gift. David promptly took a Greyhound bus to Cleveland to bring it back.

The show, to our relief, was a great success, with good reviews and several sales the first night, and more following. The family was not unduly upset at our plans to settle out West. At least we'd be in the same country and on the same continent. As we tried to cram almost everything we owned

into the little car, the kids watched David carefully packing and space in the car diminishing.

“Where will we go, Daddy?” Heather asked.

“Oh, we’ll tie you to the roof with a rope,” David joked. He always teased the kids.

“Mommy, Daddy says he’s going to tie us to the roof with a rope,” Heather came inside where I was packing clothes to tell me.

I thought she understood it was a joke and offhandedly replied, “I guess that will work.”

A little while later Heather stood, looking very resolute, with her brother behind her looking worried. “David and I have talked about it, Mommy, and we really don’t want to be tied to the roof of the car.”

I was utterly dismayed, and David and I hugged the children and he showed them how he was making a comfortable padded spot in the back seat for them. Everyone laughed, but we still felt badly that we had upset the kids with our joking. Despite that misunderstanding, both kids were thoroughly enjoying the trip.

Our trek across the United States was punctuated by visits with relatives and friends. First in Cleveland, then Minnesota where we spent time on the Granahan family farm with David’s aunt and uncle, then Iowa. At our speed we had to avoid interstates and big highways. Railroad tracks we crossed at five miles an hour.

“I see a cafe,” David said, and we pulled in to the little truck stop.

The miles rolled by as we gratefully sipped the fresh hot coffee. It was almost nine o’clock before the kids woke up.

“Where are we Mommy, Daddy?” Heather was eager to know. She loved to read maps, so I showed her and let her be our navigator.

“Today we will cross this place, the Great Salt Desert.”

“Is it really full of salt?” young David asked.

“I guess so. The Great Salt Lake is. And we will reach California.”

The kids gave a cheer.

David spotted a small park with a picnic table and pulled over. He always cooked the breakfast while I made lunch for later. We all cleaned up, brushed our teeth and got comfortable. I encouraged the children to run around and get some exercise while David filled the air with the smell of bacon. He insisted on big breakfasts while we traveled.

We usually didn’t stop for lunch, just ate our sandwiches in the car. But we always stopped to sightsee and called it a day in the afternoon about three, when we’d scout out a place to unroll the sleeping bags, often graveyards, and where I could make dinner. But today was not so easy. At our slow pace the inhospitable desert leading to the Sierra seemed unending. I was beginning to feel like the Donner party and the kids were getting cranky.

When the desert ended it did so abruptly. We started climbing ever so slowly. I could see David was tense about the car.

“Honey, we made it over the Rockies just fine. We should make it up here.”

“Just barely. And the car has been through a lot since then,” he fretted.

“Don’t give in to your pessimism,” I chided. I was always glass-half-full, and since our return to the States he was usually glass half-empty. We teased each other about it. Perhaps that’s why he lived so fully in the present. He was concerned the future held threats, while I was sure it held adventures.

Despite his concern at last we were at the top and beautiful Lake Tahoe beckoned us. We managed to find a campsite above Emerald Bay while it was still light.

“Oh, look at that jay. It’s a deeper blue than I’ve ever seen on a jay before.”

David and the children hauled out the bird book and determined it was a Steller’s Jay. At dusk we took a walk and looked down at the bay.

“I love California, Mommy,” little Dave told me.

“Me, too,” I said.

We all held hands as we breathed in the sweet air. We all loved California. I reminded the children they had been born there.

We had a list of friends to visit. One of our stops was to be at the home of Jack and his second wife so he could see the children again after so many years. At each place we always inquired about inexpensive rentals. It was only Jack who had a positive answer. There were two houses for rent in the area. I didn’t want to live so close to Jack, but David dug in his heels. He admitted later he didn’t want to take the car any farther loaded the way it was. He became attached to one of the houses, the more isolated of the two. It was an old farmstead outside of the little town of Bodega. He was so determined, I agreed to rent it even though the farmhouse was filthy.

We worked tirelessly scrubbing, painting, and repairing to make the house livable and moved in. As we finally unloaded our belongings at the newly cleansed house we were calling home, an earthquake struck.

We were inside and at first thought a truck had hit the house. The Japanese globe light we had just hung was swinging wildly.

“Earthquake,” I yelled and David hustled us all outside. The night was quiet except for howling dogs in the distance. David took a flashlight and checked the piers and posts under the house to determine they were safe before he let us all back in.

We hugged and huddled, finished our unpacking and, exhausted, went to bed after I had sung our wary children comforting lullabies.

A few weeks later the holidays were approaching. My birthday was on Santa Lucia Day, a big deal in Sweden, and before I ever came on the scene, David remembered his grandparents celebrating the day – Grandma Jenny sipping her annual glass of a cherry cordial called Cherry Heering.

I was asleep in bed when I woke to flickering light, I sat bolt upright and yelled, “Fire!”

Before I could leap out of bed in came Heather, about ten years old at time, wearing a crown of candles, dressed in white and bearing a tray of pastries, coffee and fruit.

Behind her David and young Dave were singing Happy Birthday to me.

David and kids had decided to surprise me with what the Swedes called “the Lucia bride”. In the old country the children led by a girl with a crown of candles would wake the village with coffee and sweets to celebrate the end of the longest night of the year. That became our family custom until Heather grew up and moved out.

Our new landlords were delighted with the transformation of the old place and stopped by often to bring vegetables from their garden or game they had hunted. An old creamery building made a perfect studio for David. The children loved playing in the barns and fields. The house was big enough that the kids each had a room of their own. I set up a crafts studio upstairs.

I was suffering from culture shock and missed our peaceful little island. The day the children first boarded a school bus and we saw them off, a security guard followed the bus because the infamous Zodiac killer had threatened to attack a school bus. David and I felt we had stepped into a strange world. I hauled out my book of Cavafy's poems and read "Waiting for the Barbarians" aloud to him. We were beginning to understand why the ancient Greeks considered the rest of the world barbarian.

David knew I was missing our island. One morning he told me of a dream he had the night before.

"You lived in a beautiful little cottage and it was covered with wild roses in bloom. But the roses blocked the door and I was using clippers to trim them on the path to the door. You were upset with me and told me you loved your roses, and I told you 'I love the roses, too. I'm not going to hurt them, I just want a way to get to your door.'"

I was deeply moved by that and found even the Freudian implications of the dream very sweet. I made a conscious effort to quit brooding about Greece, and even to banish Greece from my life for a while.

As time went on we began to adjust. I built up a regular crafts clientele. The whole family would go on "selling trips" turning them into sightseeing excursions all over northern California. We began to love the area. David started making figurative sculpture out of wood, mostly large redwood slabs he found on the farm which the landlord was happy to give to him. A large unicorn began taking shape and then a larger-than-life Eve. He expressed no interest in abstract art any more, nor in hunting down another gallery so we could hold more shows.

“Galleries are only interested in abstract work. I can make custom furniture to sell and earn some money that way,” he told me.

I had met several couples where the man was the artist and the woman became his sales manager, getting very aggressive and pushy. I contemplated becoming like that to get David’s art out in the world, but I knew he’d hate a scene like that, and I’d hate it even more. I got to work on my handicrafts and began wholesaling as much as I could.

He wanted to do just figurative carving. I saw his attitude toward his work changed as well. Unlike his abstract work which he was willing to toss away, he enjoyed his figurative pieces and displayed them happily. They each held meaning for him. The Eve he did a year and half after we got to California while I was trying to become pregnant. The unicorn he did while I pregnant.

“I thought a unicorn was symbol of purity,” I told him as I watched him work.

“It is running free, but captive, it is a symbol of fertility, and I am putting this one in a fence,” he grinned at me.

Heather and little Dave began attending the local school where it turned out they were well ahead of the children their age academically. Heather brought home Liz. Liz was Heather’s best friend at school and soon became a fixture at our house. She was a sweet girl and seemed very practical and level-headed for her age.

When the girls wanted to have an overnight stay at our place, I went to meet Liz’s mother Jill. On meeting her, I marveled even more at Liz’s maturity. Jill lived in a small house just at the edge of a hamlet named Freestone. There were several motorcycles parked outside the house and, although it was early in the day, a bunch of men were drinking beer on the porch. Jill herself was smoking a joint

and when I introduced myself and asked if Liz could spend the night, Jill's reaction was, "Whatever." I left my phone number but when I asked Jill for hers she said she had no phone service.

"Well don't be too judgmental. She can't be too bad a mother, or maybe the father is together because Liz is such a good kid," was David's reaction when I described Liz's home scene. Liz loved us and because she spent so much time with us at times it felt like we had acquired another daughter. Sometimes her younger sister Ann would come, too. In fact, it became unusual for Liz not to be around for dinner, and when she wasn't I would inquire after her.

"This is the week she and Ann have to visit their dad."

"Do they like going there?"

"Not really. They don't like their stepmom," Heather told us.

We decided to take advantage of our stability and have another child. For me it was an opportunity to do it right. To actively want a baby, work at it, have its father an integral part of the whole process and be there for its birth; all of the things I had not had with Jack. For David it was experiencing the first two years of fatherhood which he had missed with Heather and little Dave. In due course I became pregnant. Heather and Dave were excited at the prospect and everyone pored over name books picking names for the new baby.

David took an active interest in the pregnancy and my growing belly. He insisted on photographing me even at my most swollen state.

"But I look awful, and this dress makes me look even bigger."

"Oh, you're silly. You look beautiful and I want to remember you this way when you've had the baby. You won't look like this very often you know," he laughed at me.

“I hadn’t thought of it that way before.”

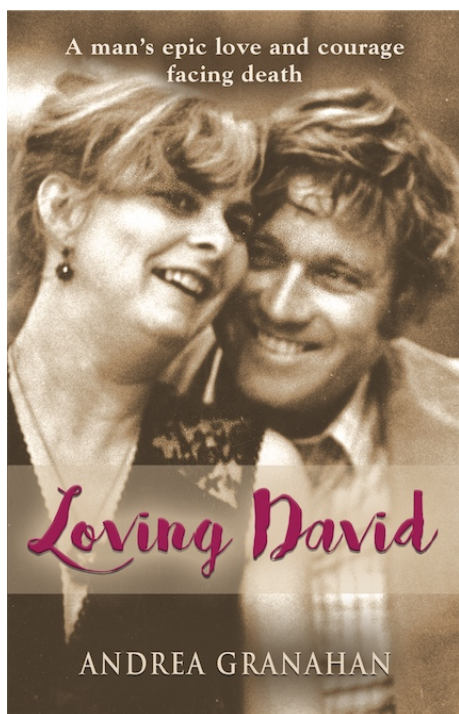
Towards the end of my pregnancy I persuaded David to enter an art competition. He felt too distracted by the upcoming birth to really concentrate but agreed to enter the life-sized carving he had made of me that the kids had named Wooden Mommy, because it was the easiest to move. He took first prize and best of show.

We were taking Lamaze classes but became dropouts when I went into labor earlier than expected. We had just come from a press photo session at the art show and gone to bed early when it began - the day before Father’s Day.

In a panic David called our instructor to ask her what we should do at the latter stages.

The labor was long, longer than with the first two, lasting all night and into the next afternoon, and not easy. I was determined to see it through without drugs and David massaged my back continuously through the labor. When Devin finally arrived, David wept. In the hallway as they were wheeling me to my room, David was overcome with emotion, and suddenly leaned down and kissed me. “I love you so much,” he told me.

I was worn out and sleepy but felt like I was glowing. “Happy Father’s Day,” I murmured.



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