

Adventures in McCloudland

By Marilyn J. Ogden

Chapter 1

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We sat, as we had done countless times, deep in our private thoughts, staring up the block at our dream. We were barely conscious of the café sounds and other people moving about.

It struck me that both the rainy day and our gray mood were in sharp contrast to those on an August afternoon, two years before. It had been bright and sunny, full of promise. All possibilities were possible. All dreams, do-able.

But now it was raining again. Or yet. At least 40 days and 40 nights. We'd jokingly asked Ray, our contractor, about his ark building capabilities. They needed some dry weather to do some outside trenching for sewer connections. But all we were getting was more rain.

We'd finished our lunch and found ourselves just sitting and looking up the block at her. She'd been dead that first time we saw her...spent and empty.

Now at least the project was moving forward. Our roller coaster life was finally settling into something more manageable. But never be too sure of the potion you're drinking. Shrinking and growing tall can be surprising and disconcerting. We were about to be brought down to size..

We sat at the Soda Shoppe where Tommy makes the best milkshakes this side of heaven. Even in the chill of winter, his shakes provided a solace and comfort in the form of chocolate that I often turned to. The wood stove in the middle of the room glowed as it warmed the room and allowed us to take off layers of damp coats and gloves. Tommy's parents, Ed and Bonnie, were in the corner booth designated for the Simon's family members, who always seemed to know the rules of this tea party. We were still strangers. (We didn't have a clue at that time that we'd always be strangers; never invited to the table of Mother McCloud.) Several others were also enjoying the shelter and food. The windows on the corner shop provide a perfect vantage point for peering up the street past the hotelclear to Mt. Shasta. We'd often sat there staring at our forlorn hotel wondering if it was ever going to happen. And trying to imagine what it would be like when it did. We were stirred from reoccurring day dream when several

people stood and pointed up the street....at our hotel...and commenting..."Look there...they're flying offthere goes some more"...and more."

We looked up the street and we saw shingles flying off in the wind. Our shinglesoff our roof. The wind picked up big clumps of brown shingles, laid them back toward the top spine of the roof, and flung them off the 70' high launching pad. Airborne.

When we'd bought this place, Lee's sister (he's my husband, she's my sister-in-law), admonished us to "make sure it has good wiring." Well, the truth is it didn't have good anything; except the roof. The building had been condemned for 12 years. It needed new wiring, new plumbing, new heating, new everything... except a roof. It got to be a joke when people asked how much work it needed, we'd just smile and say, "Well, we don't have to replace the roof."

The bank had owned the building between owners and, because it was an historic landmark, was responsible to see that it didn't fall down...for any reason. So they'd put on a roof just three years before. It was the only bright spot we could offer our concerned family and friends who were afraid we had fallen down some rabbit hole and made the biggest mistake of our lives.

And now the one thing we didn't have to replace was swirling about town like a novice had tried to shuffle a deck of cards. We grabbed our coats and ran up the street. Panic in my soul. "Is the whole roof going to blow off? ...how do we get it to stop?"

We had been fighting for 17 months to get this project started. We'd done a hard sell to over 20 banks and finally convinced one there were no unexpected expenses. In the process they'd demanded we commit every resource. There was no cushion left. We were tapped out. We couldn't stand any surprises.

We stood there and watched; buffeted by the wind and rain. What else could we do but watch? We walked around back where most of the shingles were landing; it looked like 52 pickup. Some were picked up by the wind again and carried off in a new direction. Over a neighbor's house ...down the street.

We shielded our faces to the rain and gaped up at the huge roof. Big dark patches of old wood shingles were being exposed as the newer layer was carried away.

We ran inside where it had been filled with construction noises just a half hour ago when we left to have lunch. Now it was quiet. Everyone was on their lunch break. We walked upstairs with dread to the second floor and glanced down the hall. The second floor was framed and the bath tub enclosures in place. It all appeared dry. We open the door to the narrow stairs and went up to the third floor. Ray's up there, peering into a huge opening they had cut the week before in the ceiling. He shined his

flashlight into the huge expanse of dark attic the old shingles, now freshly exposed to the weather again, seemed to be holding fine. Small amounts of water shone on the attic floor. The third floor ceiling was already a mess with huge old water stains and gaping cracks from heavy snow packs when the building was unoccupied and unheated. Dried paint hung in sheets from the ceiling.

“If the old shingles hold okay, we should be able to confine the water damage to the third floor,” Ray commented. Good ...we weren’t restoring the third floor. We anxiously asked Ray if he thought they will hold. After all, we were going to ask him about building an ark ...he had to have some special knowledge that we didn’t. Somebody had to be in control here.

We all peer into the opening again. Small slits of daylight shone through cracks like eyes peering into the attic space. A light rain drifts in. The third floor ceiling is damp in spots, but not soaked.

The next few days were pretty bad. I tried not to overreact and feel desperate, but I couldn’t help but think it was just too ironic. The project was finally moving forward; everything looking good. But now, the one thing we didn’t have to replace is strewn about the property ...the neighborhood. Proof of our foolishness to take this on. Proof that Alice had overstepped her bounds and entered a world she couldn’t control ...couldn’t even understand.

Several folks came by and tell us that they knew all along the bank had done a lousy job installing that roof. “It should never have been put over the old shingles. It wasn’t going to last,” they’d share.

One man stopped by with paper bags stuffed with shingles asking, “Do you need these? They were in my yard.” Like we could have glued them back on. I wish.

There was nothing we could do other than watch for water on the third floor and set out buckets ... and pray it would stop. And worry. Never mind that Ray said a new roof would cost over \$30,000. It really doesn’t matter. It might as well be \$50,000 or \$100,000. Any unexpected expense, even \$10,000, at this time was a disaster. \$30,000? Sure.

The heavy wind let up the next morning but intermittent showers continued for several days. But as we looked to the sky and conducted third floor inspections, we should have been watching the basement. Mother Nature is about to do it again.