

Adventures in McCloudland

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Chapter 4

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The next week ushers in a flurry of activity. Most of it foreshadowed what is to come.

We're sitting in Barry's conference room with a big oval table and upholstered chairs. He's on the phone, and shaking his head. Timberline Bank, located right across the street from the hotel and holder of the note, is delivering a resounding "No" to a request to carry the papers. Barry holds the phone away from his ear and grimaces. "I can assure you, sir," Barry squeezes into the conversation, "that I have known the Ogden's for many years, and expect them to manage a successful project"... "Um hum"... "I understand"... "Well, perhaps you could consider holding the note until their house is sells?" Barry hangs up the phone and says, "They won't hold the note. Not even long enough for your house to sell. I guess they've had quite a history with that place and want out of it. Totally. They want all cash at the close of escrow." Without wanting to know anything at all about us or our circumstances, they decide to have nothing to do with the hotel again. We tell Barry that they folded their hand at the wrong time.

We review the numbers with Barry. We have to buy some time for the house to sell to get the cash needed to close escrow without cashing in our IRA. After much soul searching we ask the former owner to hold papers on her equity in the hotel until our house sells (she graciously agrees) and the balance we put on a line of credit in our Oakland bank with our house as collateral. We were relieved. But I wonder how the financing part is all going to work out. Barry keeps assuring us that we "shouldn't worry." He lists our house for \$550,000 and plans for an agents' walk through next Thursday. He knows that we had had our house remodeled last year, including the kitchen. We'll only have to straighten closets, clean the basement and garage. Thirty years of stuff is in that basement; and we have 4 days. Things are going at a dizzying speed.

Then we have to tell our sons. Rod, 32, has been living in Texas for several years so he has no emotional interest in the old homestead anymore. Scott, aged 30, lives and works in Oakland and has just recently bought his own condo. Jeff, aged 27, is also working in Oakland and living in nearby Castro Valley.

They are dumbfounded when we tell them of our plans but agree to hold any criticism until they have seen the place. The issue of selling our house hits Jeff the hardest. He was born there and probably imagines the place his.

The following weekend Scott, Jeff, Lee and I take the 5-hour drive to Mt. Shasta where we stay at the Best Western. It's just one week from the first day we saw the hotel. We make the turn into McCloud and drive up Main Street. Like everyone else's, their first impression of the hotel is its huge size.

We stop at the real estate office and get the key from Annette Spitsen, Roger's wife and partner in their real estate business. We drive up the street to our hotel and park in the back. Entering from the back lobby, with flashlights, we begin to see what we had missed the week before. Many of the guest rooms are painted psychedelic colors. Several rooms on the first floor had been converted into three small living units with kitchens of sort. Garbage is everywhere. And old furniture. Dilapidated dressers, chairs, bedside tables, iron beds, and small one-drawer desk-like tables are scattered about most rooms.

Also on the first floor, next to the reservation desk, are three adjoining rooms (originally three small guest rooms) with a little kitchen consisting of a sink, 24" stove and small refrigerator and a cabinet with 2 feet of counter top. This abode is dubbed the "manager's unit" and is the only place in the hotel that has power and water and is deemed habitable. It had been maintained by the previous owner for the convenience of a caretaker. One door opens from the first small room into the lobby next to the registration desk. Doors from each of the two remaining small rooms open into the main hall. An exit door opens from the small kitchen area to the outside back porch. (I didn't know it, but those three rooms will become my home for the next 18 months.)

We even venture into the basement where the town library had been. It's totally dark as all the windows had been boarded up and, as in the rest of the building, there is no power. It's a little spooky and we shine our lights everywhere, searching out corners for surprises. Wooden painted bookshelves line the walls and there are four unusual high wooden chairs piled in a corner. We guess maybe they had been barber chairs...or shoe shine chairs...but neither seems correct. Our lights catch remnants of an apartment in a sorry state; the concrete floor shows signs of having been under a considerable amount of water and mud. A toilet sits in the bathtub. It's surreal and we aren't sure whether to laugh or be concerned about the terrible state of the place. And there is debris. Junk of all description is piled and strewn about. Old mattresses, wine and liquor bottles, along with various articles of clothing lay about. As our flashlights focus on each small space, we fail to get the big picture. Instead we see bits and pieces of it. It's probably a good thing we can't see it all. At the far end there are doors

to the outside. Debris fills this passage, though, so we can't get down that corridor to the doors.

Scott doesn't say much. He always holds any judgment and just accepts people and events. He is the most even tempered, non-judgmental person I have ever known. So his reaction to our hotel and plans is quiet acceptance. I know he is surprised, but says simply "If this is what you want to do, it's fine." But he asks, "Where's the rest of the town?"

Jeff is much more vocal. After his initial disappointment about our needing to sell the house, he bounced back and was ready to jump into our new venture. He's taken with the mountain, the lake, fishing, hunting and a way of life he hadn't known. He seems pleased we're taking on something new.

As we tour we glance at each other to see if they all hear the faint sound of bag pipes. Yes, the sound is coming from the church behind the hotel.

The day is clouding up and a brisk wind is bringing gusts of chilly air.

Scott retrieves the video camera he brought and begins systematically touring each floor of the hotel, taking and narrating the video. "This is room 103... it looks like a small kitchen with a room adjoining it." "Hmmm, this bathroom has a broken tub and the door is broken, too." We toddle along behind... trying to take in as much as possible. It took almost an hour to nose into each room, identify it, and briefly describe its condition. None of them are pretty.

It's going to need a lot of work. The rooms are very small; much too small for a queen sized bed, with private baths and sitting areas. We're going to need to double the size of each guest room, probably removing every other wall and then adding a bathroom in each new room space.

And it's definitely going to need painting.

Scott finished the videotaping and we piled into the van to drive around town a bit. We drive with a more objective eye. The sky is getting very dark and the wind is gusting hard, tearing leaves from the trees and tossing them about town. We ask Scott to keep the video running and survey Main Street.

At the foot of Main Street is Marty's Antiques in a cute little house. Coming up Main on the left is Spitsen's Mountain Homes Real Estate, and then the large mercantile building. It houses a soda shop, a general store, handicraft store, fabric shop and a couple of professional offices inside. It's an imposing structure with what appears to be a full second floor under a huge roof, not unlike ours. It also needs paint.

Just up from the mercantile building is another log structure with a beauty shop, a homeowners' association, and an insurance office. Out front is a large round fountain made of local lava rock. Beyond that is the remnants of a burned out train depot. Nothing remains but a huge three story brick enclosure about 8 feet on each side. It looks like it might have been the chimney. (We learn later it had been the vault.) Three empty lots complete the left side of Main Street. Two of the lots are grass and lined with big poplar trees. The middle lot is a concrete slab with metal posts around the edge. A full grown poplar tree grows up through the concrete. The slab is lined with green metal rusted pipes evenly spaced on the street side. Railroad tracks line the back side of each lot and parallel Main Street. Just beyond the tracks is a small creek. A gentle slope rises up from the other side of the creek to the backs of the houses lining the next street up.

Beginning on the bottom of Main Street again, the right side of Main Street has a half dozen garages from the houses facing the next street over, and then an insurance office and a small lot. A gift shop called The Milky Way looks recently painted with colorful turquoise and magenta trim and has wide stairs up to a front porch nearly the full width of the building. A huge calico cat is draped on the rail. Beyond the gift shop is a white, two-story wooden structure housing the museum, then a recently built post office and Timberline Bank. Our hotel nearly fills the next block. Just beyond the hotel, on the far corner, is a building containing a restaurant called the Cookhouse and a second, smaller dance hall. At the end of Main Street, looking back, is Stony Brook Inn.

There is a market, deli, video shop, and gas station at the entrance to McCloud at the turnoff from Highway 89.

Jeff asks, "Where is the music store?"