

Adventures in McCloudland

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Chapter 18

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Driving to McCloud by myself in my own car I review the exciting changes that have taken place in our lives. I can't imagine who would have believed it just a few months ago. In my rear view window I see Lee, who's totally turned his life around as well. It'll be hard for him to commute to San Francisco, work all week, then commute to McCloud and back again. He is such an easy going person who takes everything in stride. I'm so glad he is my partner. At the same time, I'm excited about the project and hope everything goes as we have planned. We arrive in McCloud after lunch and start settling in. It doesn't take long. I clean up the kitchen and bath, sweep out the other two rooms I will use, move in the desk, shelves and organize some office supplies....and I 'm in business.

Although we had talked about living apart during the week, as the day wore on we both began to realize that we'd only see each other on weekends. Not a pleasant thought. I begin to have doubts and try to think of alternatives. But there are none. I try hard to snuff out those doubts and buck myself up instead by reciting the words from a song about "I am woman, I am strong." We had sung it often in the Crisis Center. It helped to block out the other quiet voice of fear.

I worry about Lee driving home in the dark, and the days are getting shorter now. I bid him goodbye. And don't cry until after he is away. I wander through the three rooms that are now my home and notice the ugliness of them. And the bedroom smells musty. And I have a good cry.

This morning, in the light, I can wander the whole building. Even though it is condemned, it's not totally depressing. It's sort of fun. Like going to summer camp. New surroundings, fun things to look forward to, and an exciting project. Anyway, we still have our real home in Oakland. We aren't really giving it up yet. And these digs

are just temporary until we get the hotel open. We'll have a nice residence again with our new furniture.

Ron, Lee and I had met and created a list of things for me to do on Monday. I'll need to file for a business name and license so I could open a checking account. I'll have to drive to Yreka, about 45 miles north on I-5, and meet with the county business office.

Ron was busy working on the Phase I documents. Ron and Lee had worked out a schedule for bid invitations with preliminary drawings out in one week, contractor's walk-through a few days later and the bid opening in another week. Phase I demolition, window replacement and porch tear-outs would begin in just 2 1/2 weeks by November 1, 1993. The schedule was tight. But everyone was on board and committed.

Monday I don on my best business-person manner and drive to Yreka.

"You want a business License?"

"Yes, for the McCloud Hotel."

"Are you starting business?"

"We're starting the renovation now. We'll open in the spring."

She leaves the counter in the county business offices of licenses and taxes while she "checks the property." It's one of those 50's government offices with gray vinyl flooring, gray counter, and a couple of uncomfortable gray chairs lest you get too cozy. She comes back after a few minutes and advises me, "That property has been condemned; you need to have the planning department, the health department, the Sheriff's Office and Building Department sign-off on the reverse side of this application. When they've signed off, we can accept your application."

Okay, I can do this. The first step is the planning commission in the building next door. The gentleman tells me, "The McCloud Hotel is not zoned for a hotel."

This has been a business on Main Street and has operated as a hotel for over 70 years and it is not zoned for a hotel. I'd have to make an application for a variance, and attend a hearing before the Planning Commission before they could approve anything.

Also, the pub and eatery would be a new use and, although we were zoned correctly for a pub and eatery, we'd have to have the new use reviewed by the planning commission to assure we had plans for providing adequate parking.

"In an historic building you are allowed to continue its historic use without having to comply with new parking requirements. But if it is a new use, you must meet county requirements for parking. We'll need to know the capacity of the pub and eatery and

your parking plans,” he advised, “then we can consider signing-off. Are you doing this alone, or is your husband here as well?”

Hmmmm. I’m not going to get their signatures that day, but I fill out the paperwork so the process can begin. I am woman, I am strong.

I drive down the street a mile or so and entered the address for the health department. It looks like a very old hospital building with offices and a reception desk for the health department. When I respond to the woman’s question that I don’t have an appointment, she advises me that “the inspector never sees anyone without an appointment. You see, he’s out of his office most of the time inspecting properties.”

When I ask about an appointment she says he will be back in about a half hour. I glance around the reception area and note the posters describing Sexual Transmitted Disease Prevention Programs and Mother’s Nursing Classes. The woman says that I should have lunch and come back.

I cross the street and as I sit over a slice of pizza I try to buoy myself up with a little pep talk. “This will work. I only need to patiently go through the steps. One at a time.”

After lunch I’m shown into the health inspector’s office. I can’t remember his name. He’s a nice person who listens to me explain why I need to have his signature even though the work wasn’t done yet. He understood and signs-off the back of the form contingent on a future inspection prior to opening. Cool. A reasonable person.

The sheriff’s officer says they didn’t have to sign off. Things were looking up.

Next step, the building department. No way is he going to sign this form. “This building is condemned. You are not allowed to operate a business or even be in this building.”

I try to explain that we are starting the project and “I need the license to…”

“You don’t have my approval to work on this building and you better not be doing anything in there.” He looks away from me to the next person, “Next please.” I have been summarily dismissed.

I walk back to the license office and try to come up with a Plan B. It’s important that we establish a bank account in the business name. We have to be able to enter contracts in the business name. There’s no Plan B that I can think of.

The person in the license department that I had spoken to previously listens patiently. When I ask her to please come up with an idea so I can solve this problem, she says she’ll take and hold my license application and fee if I file a fictitious name statement in the paper. Once done, the bank will allow the account and we can enter into contracts. Now, why didn’t she say that in the first place…about 4 hours before?

“But you need to take the application home and have your husband sign it.”

I was dumbfounded, and about a millisecond away from sarcastically responding “You’ve got to be kidding.” (It sounded like having my father sign something that I was not old enough to sign, like permission to go on a field trip.) But she was not kidding. I’ll need to return another day.

I leave with the application and head back to Mt. Shasta to place the ad. The ride back gives me time to reflect on what had just happened. I’d spent several stressful hours working through a bureaucracy and ended up back at the start with someone who had the authority and answer I needed right from the start. What a waste of energy and time. And what for?

And the planning department. A hotel that was in operation for 75 years is not zoned for a hotel. And the zoning was done after the hotel was built.

And why was the building department inspector so hostile?

I call Lee when I got back to the hotel and complained bitterly about the senseless conversations and stress that ate up most of a day. I told him I wished he were here as I was sure it would have gone differently if he had been. Oh, well, it was well in hand now. We knew what we had to do.