

## **Adventures in McCloudland**

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Chapter 45

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Restaurant, Spring 1996, Open 6 Months

When we had given up our plans for a pub and eatery, we'd actually been a bit relieved. "We can't do it all," became our mantra. We had realized how much we had taken on. Seventeen rooms would be a full time job. We'd "find our niche," and let other businesses provide their service. But there is a basic flaw in that reasoning: When you don't have control of the services being offered your guests... you don't have control.

And the restaurant next door had had a shaky past in recent years with various owners. The restaurant would close three days a week during the winter or decide to close early if business was slow. Sometimes our guests were left with no food choices at all. We'd run special discounts to get new visitors and they'd arrive hungry and no restaurants in town. The soda shop closed early during the winter and there was nowhere else in McCloud. We would try to remember to ask our guests their dinner plans when they made a reservation and suggest that they might want to get dinner in Mt. Shasta before they arrived. Many would choose to stay in Mt. Shasta as well.

Yet we knew as we were having the discussion with the owners of the building housing the restaurant next door and exploring the idea that we take it over, we realized we were likely making a big mistake. We saw no other way. The cook had come to us and told us that conditions were "so bad over there" that they were all going to quit. The restaurant would close. It was spring. We couldn't face a summer of no restaurant.

Dave and Suzanne Abbott owned the building, but not the business. They had been residents of McCloud for a long time when they had founded Dance Country and put McCloud on the Square Dancers' Map. Many of our reservations during the summer months were for dance workshop participants and they supported our efforts when we were working on the restoration.

So, in our living room one afternoon, we talked with them about the situation and what the cook had told us. Mostly, we wanted to know if the current business failed, did they have someone else in mind to take it over. We sure hoped so. They shared that there had been some problems with the current restaurant ownership and they had “been talking to a local man about taking it over, but it probably isn’t the right time for him.”

”We’d really like you and Lee to do the restaurant, Marilyn.” “You’ve done such a wonderful job with the hotel.” “We know you would make it work.” Suzanne and Dave had obviously already given this some thought.

So had we. And we wanted this to be the last resort. My father had owned restaurants, and I had no illusions about the amount of work it would take. But it seemed we had no choice.

”We really want sell the building,” Dave continued, “We’d ask a fair price.” “In the meantime, if the current owner wants out, we’ll offer you the same lease agreement he has...You pay the lease and everything associated with the building maintenance.”

After they’d gone, Lee and I decided to meet with the owner and see what he wanted to do. We still hoped he could work out his difficulties. Sadly, he confided that he desperately wanted out. “Nothing is going right” he said. “My health is bad, I can’t run this restaurant and Mac’s Frosty any longer,” he continued as his eyes clouded up. “If you could take it, it’d be wonderful. Just keep my cook,” he said, “I owe him that.”

”Of course.” Here came that roller coaster again. Full speed and full of turns.

We’d buy Bob’s equipment and inventory. He gave us a price...we took it. But he had a hard time remembering what he had bought that he was selling to us and what had been there before. Never mind, he seemed like he was in such a bad emotional state, we just scribbled a list, wrote him a check and wished him well.

We had often been asked, “Where’s your dining room?” So it seemed appropriate we call our restaurant The Dining Room and be open for dinner.

We talked with Tim, the chef we were asked to keep, and developed a menu which would change weekly and feature my family recipes...some with a new twist. We’d have weekly specials priced under \$10 and other choices up to \$18.

We also decided to set up the deck as a barbeque. Jeff does great barbeque and we would operate it during the summer months. We called it the North Yard Barbeque and Brew with a railroad theme.

We quickly set about creating the restaurant carefully watching every penny spent as we knew none of this was in our budget. Using antique buffets as dividers to break up

the expansive dining room we then added table cloths, curtains, pictures, plants and special lighting to highlight the beams. We were ready to open in less than a month, Mother's Day.

We opened with a special brunch offering our most requested breakfast dishes from the hotel. Many locals had heard about our wonderful breakfasts and we thought they might like to try them. We had a few reservations, but anticipated getting off to a somewhat slow start. Unlike the hotel opening we had not had any congratulation notes or flowers. We didn't have time to think about it much....just kind of strange.

As I recall now, somewhere...sometime, my father had said that Mother's Day was his busiest day of the year at his restaurant. I wish I had recalled it before our opening. By noon, we were all wondering if it was ever going to stop. People, waves of them, were pouring in the door. We kept making muffins and listening to rave reviews....then go about resetting for dinner.

It was after 11 when we finished. Lee gathered up the till, hauled out garbage cans and locked up for the evening. A long day, but maybe this would turn out all right.