

## Chapter 16

# *First Edition*

*"God gives every bird its food, but He does not throw it into its nest."* —J.G. Holland

*This chapter was the original Epilogue, written in April 1996 in our home in Pompano Beach, Florida, a few months before the first edition of "Embrace the Angel" was published.*

It's been almost ten years since I "sailed away to Paradise..." to freedom... to my needed break from the world of cancer. As it turns out, my *attempt* to fulfill my Dream was just that—an attempt. God had other plans for me. My journey to tell Amber's story and save the world has taken a few twists and turns; not all of them were followed with enthusiasm. Yet, each delay and detour has brought me closer to my goal... closer to this book.

After leaving New York harbor, heading for our new life in St. Croix, we sailed offshore, motored down the Inter-coastal Waterway, and ended up docking in Beaufort, North Carolina. It was the last stop... the launching point for our trip to Paradise and the ideal life that awaited.

Since Toby was now three and a half, he enjoyed the adventure of living on a boat. He would stand on the bow pulpit and wave to other boats that went by or yell to the people on the docks as we were pulling in, "Hi! I'm Toby!" We knew he would have no trouble making friends or feeling comfortable and confident in strange circumstances.

On October 30, 1986, my thirty-third birthday and the sixth anniversary of Amber's death, we were ready to make the thirteen day ocean crossing to the end point on our chart: St. Thomas, in the US Virgin Islands. Stormalong was well stocked with supplies, our sailing skills were honed, and the "weather window" was perfect. In preparation for our journey, Gary checked the oil. I

could see that something was wrong the minute I saw his face. "There's water in the oil." I looked at the dip stick. A creamy, white goo clung to it. He wiped it off and checked it again. The same result. "We've got a problem. Water's gotten into the engine... into the oil. We can't make the crossing today."

For the next few days, we tried every trick in the book to find the source of the water and fix it, all to no avail. It was now November and our "weather window" was beginning to close. Finally, it shut. For the next three months, we stayed in Beaufort to find the source of the water infiltration and repair it. Crossing the Gulf Stream that runs south to north up the East Coast was dangerous and we needed to be prudent and safe. "Let's stay put and fix it right." We both agreed.

We worked with a local mechanic who told us to pull the engine out of the boat and place it on skids he put on the dock. Using our boom as a "come-along," we made the preparations. A "Nor'easter—" where the sea is whipped, counter clockwise, into the eastern seaboard—was fast approaching. It would be upon us in a matter of hours. We had no choice but to go for it. "Gary, are you sure we should do this?" I hesitated but knew time was of the essence as our money was running out. "Living aboard builds character," I remembered hearing or saying to myself or reading somewhere. This was just another building block.

Finding more problems with the engine, we stayed in Beaufort for three months while the mechanics repaired them. Gary, being resourceful and caring as always, found odd boat jobs nearby. When those dried up, he took a bus up to Annapolis, Maryland, to work with his friend, Peter Paglia, in his wood shop, Atlantic Woodworks. We were grateful for the money *and* the friendship. We were "down to the dregs."

Our "\$25 Christmas" was upon us and we vowed to make the most of it. Gary was working in Annapolis so Toby and I borrowed the loaner car at the marina where we were docked and went shopping. We got a small, artificial tree for \$8, a bit of tinsel, and decorated the tree with his toys and other objects. I secretly bought him a couple of "Hot Wheels" from Santa. Gary returned from working in Annapolis just in time to celebrate Christmas. We did not have much in money or things, but having come through our ordeal with Amber, our values had certainly adjusted. Health,

family, friends, and home were the most important things in life, in that order. We were wealthy; we had an abundance of all of them.

In January, the engine was finally repaired and in place and we were ready to move on. We needed to build up our savings before we made the crossing to the Virgin Islands. "Do we continue heading south to Florida and take a chance at finding work or motor back up the Inter-coastal to Annapolis and have security?" That was the dilemma. After much debate and discussion, we went with more security. Although it was the middle of winter, we knew we could live aboard; we'd done it before in Connecticut. We set off on our journey to Annapolis. It was quite the adventure as we motored our way through the heavy fog and ice covered water, but we made it to City Dock. We'd stay for the winter. Our plan was to work, pay off our debts, and then carry on to live our dream in the Caribbean.

Winter went, spring came, then summer. We were finding our niche and beginning to settle down in this quaint harbor town on the Chesapeake Bay. We put Toby in school, Gary continued to work at the Peter's shop, and I started a business varnishing boats, a trade I'd begun while living aboard in Milford. It was possible to bury the torment and ignore the reality of cancer. Nobody knew me. I could get on a boat, keep my head down, and work on the brightwork, taking care to make it as "perfect" as humanly possible. "Ahh... peace at last," I'd sigh as I set about sanding and varnishing. I was in hiding and I knew it. I also knew that I couldn't hide forever. One day, I would *have* to complete my Life Task but only when the timing was right. And it wasn't right yet.

Too impatient to wait, I needed to take action... to stop people from dying. No matter how much I tried to ignore it, I couldn't. Every day I was reminded that cancer continued to kill. As I stood in line at the grocery store, watched the news on TV, talked with the parents at Toby's school, or picked up a paper, somebody—somewhere—was suffering with cancer. *EVERY MINUTE, SOMEONE WAS DYING*: Another movie star, politician, writer, philanthropist, TV personality, sports figure, neighbor, friend, or stranger. I simply could not set this issue aside and go on with my life, letting all those people suffer and die, and wait for

someone else to speak out on their behalf. Once again, I jumped back in the fray.

I dug out the "third draft" of Amber's book, dusted it off, and assembled the voluminous notes and materials I had continued to collect through the years. In the winter of '88, I hunkered down in our boat and buried myself again in my obsession. I sat down to write what I hoped would be the "*last draft*" of the book.

In the meantime, Gary and I were growing apart. "Our Dream" together became "*My Dream*." We ended our marriage in March of '89. Though we remained close, our personal goals and priorities were worlds apart. We continued to raise Toby together with the same commitment to parenting that we shared with Amber and Todd: Love, trust, respect, caring, discipline, manners, and compassion for others. I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to redeem my own childhood by raising Toby and watching him develop into a fine young man. He has all the qualities of Amber and Todd, yet he's clearly an individual in his own right.

Believing that our future was not in Annapolis but in Pompano Beach, Florida, Toby and I moved into a house with Aunt Anne. She needed a family as much as we did. Uncle Bill had died a few years earlier and I was now divorced from Gary. We clung to each other and the hope of creating a family... a safe haven... an oasis to cherish as we faced our day-to-day living. It was good to provide a fulfilling life for Aunt Anne and Toby, but a struggle to keep it afloat on my own.

The house was a "Money Pit," just like the movie. With no man and no resources, I was left to get it done... to put my construction skills to use... to transform this house into a home for me, Toby, and Aunt Anne. I set to work repairing and remodeling. Most of my time was spent fixing, painting, and maintaining our home. It didn't leave much time for Toby but I did my best to carve out "quality time" to be "Mom." I knew I was only one person and a very fragile one at that. Once again, I had to hide it for the sake of my son.

Along with seeing myself as human, I began to see others in the same light. "The Enemy" in the War on Cancer, was only men

and women who had the same goal that I did: Eradicate cancer in our lifetime. The *way* they chose to achieve it varied drastically from mine in some cases; paralleled it in others. I came to see that pointing a finger to *blame* them for propagating cancer, only stopped me from looking further; from continuing my pledge to *work together to save the others*. Amber was the symbol under which to unite. "They *will* listen to Amber." MY message died as Amber's gave birth in my imagination... in my mind... and, eventually, on my computer screen.

All the bitterness, rage, and resentment that fueled my previous attempts at publishing, were replaced by realistic compassion and forgiveness. I tore down my walls of resistance and let Amber write this book. "How would *she* see this person? What would *she* say... think... feel about this situation?" I realized that *all* of us are human without exception, even the doctors who misdiagnosed Amber's cancer. We are human *first* and what we choose to do with our humanity *second*. *What we do for a living comes second to how we are living our lives*.

I sat down to write the *fourth* draft of Amber's book but now it had a title: *Embrace the Angel*, God's words to me when I emerged from the shower in Montreal and saw Amber sleeping on her back with her toes shoes poking through the blankets and her ballerina outfit on. Draft after draft, I grew with each one. I discovered more bits of wisdom... of insight... of direction from God. Letting go of *my* words, thoughts, and deeds and "letting God," moved me closer to the final draft.

This draft was different from the others; it had feeling and passion. Putting off the inevitable, was really at the core of why I couldn't face or relive the pain. I could see that some of the roadblocks on the path to publishing the book were placed there by me. "I'm not ready to 'take Amber's book to the world' until I...

...spend a month or so on an island 'fine tuning' the manuscript."

...have enough money to publish it myself."

...grow my nails."

...buy a computer and printer and 'do it right'."

...lose weight."