



## Epilogue

Today is the thirty year anniversary of Amber's death and my fifty-seventh birthday. It is the perfect time to remember... to reflect... to gather the parts of my past that I need to let go. Completing this rewrite, republishing it, and then seeing it on the bookshelf, is my way of "closing the book" on this journey and opening up my future for what lies ahead.

As I sit here in my Studio, watching the crystal which hangs in the skylight spread its multitude of rainbows across my periwinkle walls, I'm reminded of Amber's "Rainbow Room." I am feeling contented, excited, even exhilarated. Having spent the last several months writing and rewriting the first edition of *Embrace the Angel*, I am finally at a place of peace. I am ready to launch it, let go, and move in another direction.

The past thirty years have been filled with every emotion, thought, and feeling that you can imagine... that you have probably experienced in your own life as well. For me, this time has been one of discovery, transition, challenge, and learning. I am forever grateful to Amber and to God for teaching me to keep my heart open to love, not closed from pain. Doing so, has allowed me to "see the change" that Amber knew her death would bring. A prophecy from a soon-to-be angel, her words continue to transform my life: "Mom, when I die, I'll still be *Amber*, I'll just be

*different.*” She continues to teach me “the difference” as I travel along my path to teach others.

My journey with Amber transformed me from a young woman with no purpose in life to a woman with a mission to elevate others... from drifting without a destination to staying focused on the mark on my internal compass... from wondering why God chose me to knowing exactly why He put me on this earth. My childhood prepared me to be the mother to my own children that I wanted from my own. The trials and tribulations in my life gave me the tools, confidence, and persistence to keep going until I found a solution. Recalling what Amber endured with grace and dignity, taught me about what is *really* important in life: Sharing my life with loved ones, maintaining my health, spending my limited time on earth wisely, and using my “Power Within” for good.

As with any life story, mine is filled with people who touched me deeply—whether our time together was for a moment or for years. I crossed paths with thousands of people during my time here on earth. We were deliberately meant to meet and exchange our “life lessons.” Each one added a thread to my tapestry of life. All made me who I am today.

After our divorce in 1986, Gary and I set our differences aside and continued to parent Toby together. I concentrated on raising my son and earning a living working on the brightwork—the teak wood trim—of boats. It was difficult and physically exhausting but it paid the bills and allowed me to enjoy my obscurity and solitude.

With my portion of the proceeds from the sale of Stormalong, our 43’ Hans Christian that we lived aboard, I produced a how-to video titled *Secrets of the Trade: Brightwork, the Art of Varnishing*. It was fun and exciting to write the script and hire a company to film me. It was my reward for all the days I worked in the snow and frigid winds of winter; the rain, sun, heat and humidity of summer, and in every other condition you can imagine.

Although very involved with my community, I knew there was something missing. Toby was a teenager who began emerging into his own life, one separate from my own. From

Amber, I learned that *people do die* and so I raised him to be a healthy, happy, man able to get along in this world without me, should I die first. He learned this lesson well.

After 10 years of being single, I was ready to move in another direction... to develop my own life, one without my children in my sight but always in my heart. It was during a trip to Europe with my good friend Susan and her family, that my path became clear.

We celebrated a lovely Christmas week in England at her parents, Dori and Ken's home, then I went on to France on my own. I landed in Paris with no plan, only a desire to see the country, know the people, and find myself. I bought a "Eurail Train Pass" and launched my expedition, heading south to Toulouse to spend the New Year. I found myself alone in my hotel room at midnight with a bottle of wine, a loaf of bread, and a chunk of cheese. I called Gary and spoke with Toby. "Hi Mom!" My heart melted. "Are you having fun in France?" I was, but still, something or *someone* was missing.

Taking the train from Marseilles to Geneva, Switzerland, was magical. I sat alone in the passenger cabin "ooohing and aaahing" at the incredible beauty of the pristine mountains, streams, and villages around me. It was a memory in the making and I looked around, hoping to share this incredible scene with someone—anyone who was near enough to hear me—stranger or not. The cabin was empty. I was alone. This realization drowned out the deafening silence.

It was then that I realized I'd come full circle... that I'd arrived at the other end of the "Soul Mate Spectrum." From "I don't need a man" to "I don't want a man" to "I'd be *nice* to have a man in my life" to "I NEED a man to share my life with." This took me by surprise, but I knew it was right. "When I get back to the 'States, I'm going to find a man, someone who is caring, loving, and will share the 'Four Corner Foundation' that anchors my life: Morals, values, interests, and goals." The oh, so true Swedish proverb, came to mind: "Shared joy is double joy. Shared sorrow is half sorrow."

Knowing that the Man of My Dreams had not... *would* not come knocking at my door, I joined an online matchmaking site.

Dating was different this time; it was more about what *I* could do for him than what *he* could do for me. “Mine” would become “ours,” we would give without expectation, be willing to compromise, and not measure words, deeds, or love. We would see our relationship as an empty glass into which we both poured ourselves. Once we “emptied our glasses” into our relationship, it would be impossible to see who gave what and where the dividing line was. I’d learned a lot from my two previous failed marriages, and I was determined not to make it three. “I only have so much time on this earth and I have to use it wisely,” was a thought I repeated often.

After several months of searching, I met John on July 4, 1998, a day filled with firecrackers and celebration of our country’s independence, of our dependence on one another. It was an irony that was recognized. We met at a bookstore, a neutral, public place, recommended for online meetings. I suspected he might “be the one” but restrained myself and enjoyed his company without expectations. “Want to head into DC and watch the fireworks on The Mall?” “Sure, let’s do it!” I was ready to take the plunge.

Taking a train into Washington, DC, we landed on the National Mall and merged into the crowd’s current. I could only see him; the rest were strangers, merely moving objects in the background. As the evening progressed, I shared my life—all of it, both good and bad. He didn’t flinch. “It will take a *really* strong man to be in my life... to love me with all of his heart,” I thought. By the end of the night, I knew. “He *is* the one.”

We’ve been together for nearly thirteen years now. John has truly transformed me from a restless crusader to a contented woman (still with an exuberant joy for living), very much in love with my husband, truly grateful for the blessings I’ve been given. Sharing my life with him, his family and mine, our friends, and Annie, our Jack Russell, has been the fulfillment of my early dreams and satisfied my deepest desire to belong, to be cared for, to be accepted without hesitation for exactly who I am.

Living my life in the light, away from the shadows of CancerWorld, gave me the chance to grow and flourish. I was able to take some of the lessons learned in my childhood—“Be

prepared for anything” and “Make sense out of chaos”—and transform them into ways which would help others.

I got involved in my community as Outreach Coordinator for the City of Annapolis Office of Emergency Management, delivering workshops and presentations on “Preparedness” throughout the region. It was my passion! I was able to empower others to feel more secure in our uncertain world. Rather than live in fear of the unknown, they could relax, knowing that they and their loved ones would be comfortable with enough food, water, and supplies to last through whatever crisis came—whether it was a snowstorm, job loss, terrorist attack, or hurricane.

Learning how to transform chaos into calm as a little girl, I began to study the art and science of Professional Organizing. It was a great career choice, as I was able to use all the skills and tools I’d collected from the various jobs throughout my life: Design, carpentry, business, helping others overcome challenges and reach their potential. It was a productive outlet and a powerful way to change people’s lives by changing the *things* that were in it.

My life has been powerful and peaceful; full to the brim with memories, challenges, opportunities, experiences, and people. Most of all, it’s the *people* in my life who add color, dimension, and meaning. People, and the precious time we spend with them, are what matter in the end.

Here is an update on the people who were (and some still are) a part of Amber’s story and my life:

### **Toby...**

...is in the Navy keeping us safe and protected. It’s been over eight years now and he plans to stay the full twenty and retire at forty-one. I admire and respect the man he has become and the life he has created: A woman he loves at his side, a full circle of good friends, and family he knows he can count on and trust. He and his girlfriend, Kimberly, along with their two dogs, Soco and Mali, live just a few hours away in Virginia Beach.

It’s been wonderful to have a second child in this life! I’ve been given another chance to “mother” and enjoy watching my