



*Waiting for Elizabeth: My Journey, Book 3*  
By Ben Bryant

## Foreword

I was shocked when Ben asked me to write this foreword. Truth be told, I didn't even want him to write the book. Who wants to resurrect life's painful chapters even if they ultimately deliver the players to peaceful conclusions? Not me! But the determination (bordering on bull-headedness) and dedication of this man to tell his story, was non-negotiable. So here we are.

Much to my dismay at times, he read every chapter of this book to me. And though it was often "not a day at the beach", it wasn't as difficult as I'd anticipated.

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Being a born leader (Someone said to me recently: "Ben doesn't suffer fools gladly.") his powerful voice served him well as a Producer and First Assistant Director in film, commercials, and live musical events. An innately curious man, he was always willing to jump into the deep end of the pool, often conquering very steep learning curves. From film he moved on to video production – shooting, directing and editing. All of these disciplines require much study and practice. And in our relentlessly shifting technological age, there's no end to the ever-evolving tools. Ben just keeps embracing it all.

Furthermore, and perhaps most significant, through many of his most stressful periods – even our separation and divorce, as devastating as they were – Ben maintained his equanimity. The vicissitudes of life seemed to be no match for his innately positive perspective. And I was amazed as he shared his rendition of our most arduous times, that I wasn't more upset. I could hear that his love for me had remained despite the anger and hurt, and that the love ultimately eclipsed them. Moreover, given that his ground of being is firmly ensconced in his steadfast sense of humor, laugh-out-loud-funny was often the result.

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I'm very proud of him and his indomitable and adventurous spirit. By the way, I love him.

– Elizabeth Hepburn, November 2014 NYC

### Openers: *Waiting for Elizabeth*

The wedding tradition of the groom standing at the front of the church waiting for the bride is no accident. It's basic training for marriage. As you get a few chapters into this book the specific meaning of the title will become clear. But now I want to talk a bit about waiting for women. I'm confident that all heterosexual men will resonate with what I have to say.

One evening in 2003 or 2004 Elizabeth (often abbreviated as EH) was meeting me at a subway stop downtown to go see a show. \*\*\* and while I was waiting I got to thinking about the act of waiting for her. We'd been together by then for thirty-six or seven years and, while punctual to a fault when it came to gigs, in some situations she could be a tad (to use one of her contextually-defined words) "wifty" about time. It seemed always to take her longer than anticipated to complete her final preparations when we were going somewhere together so I spent a fair amount of time at our front door inquiring, "Should I push the elevator button?"

Anyhow in my mind I began to guesstimate how many hours a week I spent waiting for my beloved. It's been nine or ten years since I did this little exercise and it was done in my not-very-mathematical head so don't expect a lot of accuracy but it was an amazing amount of time

over nearly forty years. Figure (wild guess encompassing over three decades) two hours an average week which is 104 hours a year times 37 years is almost 23 weeks! And you know what? It was worth it. When I add my mom and the myriad girlfriends before I met Elizabeth to the waiting list, fuhgeddaboutit!

But to get back to where I started this piece, this sort of waiting is not what this book is about. You'll see.

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### **Chapter 27: On the Road (1990)**

[Travels with my two Best Friends]

On Monday, 4 June 1990 Elizabeth and I set out on a six week car trip to points west.

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[Day 3] Having had an early start we pulled into our Shamrock [Texas] motel a little after 6:00 and we were pooped. The small pool looked delicious and five minutes after we checked in I was immersed. The water had to be eighty degrees. Elizabeth, who loves to swim, decided that a cool shower in the air conditioned room was more desirable than a dip in that tepid pool.

After a little rest I walked – I suppose in the Texas panhandle, one moseys – I moseyed over to the office and inquired as to where I might find the best restaurant in Shamrock. After some discussion between the two young ladies one of them informed me that the Dairy Queen was just down the road. What the hell do you do when the best restaurant in town is a Dairy Queen?

### **Chapter 28: Seven Nights (1989–1992)**

[Elizabeth takes the Stage]

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When you do outdoor concerts you pray to the weather gods – whether you believe in them or not. They heard our prayers for three out of four nights. Not too shabby. Friday was a different deal altogether as you will see.

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## Chapter 29: Video Casting Source (1990–1994)

[Talking Headshots]

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We bought a Sony EVO 9700 Hi-8 (cuts only) editing system \*\*\* And I had to learn how to use [it].

Just off the main area of Ed’s studio there was a small storage room with a desk in it. When the edit system was delivered I unpacked it and set it up on that desk. As I was doing this an actress, one of our discounted helpers, asked what it was. When I told her she said, “Are you an editor?” To which I replied, “Ask me again in a week.”

I sat in that room for ten hours a day for the next several days until I could comfortably execute the basic tasks required for assembling our reels.

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In *Circumstances Beyond My Control* I told of the many occasions when I came home – after shooting in the rain all day, or freezing my ass off on the Brooklyn Bridge in February or spending twenty-two straight hours in a sound stage – and said to Elizabeth, “In my next life I’m coming back as an editor.” As it turned out I didn’t have to die and reincarnate.

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## Chapter 30: Ben Bryant Video is Born (1994–1996)

[Soloist again]

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I don’t recall exactly when this momentous event occurred but sometime in ‘95 EH asked me to sleep on the futon. I think it was shortly after she went to the bank to get some cash from her own checking account – in which she thought she had a balance of around \$1,500 – and found it empty: zero balance. The NYS Tax folks had put a lien on the account and taken every last nickel. Talk about a body blow! This was the beginning of the end.

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Elizabeth’s shrink recommended a colleague, Herb Robbins, who turned out to be ten years my senior, twice married and a former pro piano player. We hit it off immediately.

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For openers Herb had a great sense of humor – as did Manny, my first shrink back in the ‘70s – which made a sometimes painful process a bit less onerous. As I learned more about him he became an even more interesting guy. Raised by vaudevillian parents, as a child he spent time with an “A List” of soon-to-be famous performers from the Ritz Brothers to Jack Benny. Before Herb was ten he could do a soft shoe with hat and cane as well as play piano. I don’t remember how it was that he grew up to be a psychologist instead of a song and dance man but I am glad it worked out that way.

One of my favorite Herb Robbins stories is about the time when he was in Africa as a young doctor, touring with some sort of UN group. He and his band of Americans found themselves in the camp of a nomadic tribe who didn’t seem all that friendly. Surrounded by hostile looking half-naked warriors with face paint and spears, they had no way of communicating their friendly intentions and were becoming concerned that white meat may be a delicacy favored by

their hosts. In a moment of inspiration evoked by sheer terror Herb began to dance a soft-shoe. Almost immediately smiles spread across the previously stoic ebony faces and the formerly fierce fighters began to imitate his movements. Soon the entire encampment was filled with joyous terpsichorean glee and no one became a light lunch for the locals.

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My old friend Ellie Ellsworth, with whom I'd done *Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris* way back in '71 and from whom I had heard not a word for several years, called one day and asked what I was doing in August. I said something like, "It's March. I don't know what I'm doing in April." She invited me to breakfast to discuss a project.

We met at a diner on Broadway in the 90s a few days later and Ellie told me about her current passion, something called *The Cabaret Symposium*. "Cab Symp" as it was referred to by familiars, was a nine day training program for Cabaret performers of which Ellie was founder and artistic director. Held at the famous and pastoral O'Neill Theatre Center in Connecticut each August, the program attracted singers – called Cabaret Fellows – from all over the country as well as the occasional Brit. \*\*\* There were about a dozen so called "Master Teachers". That list comprised such luminaries as singers Margaret Whiting and Julie Wilson, songwriters Babbie Green and Carol Hall as well as five of the best piano player/coach/accompanist/arrangers in the business including Tex Arnold, Shelley Markham and Paul Trueblood. There were several other teachers I'd never heard of but who turned out to be really good. For each of the first five days of the event there were approximately ten hours of activities that Ellie wanted videotaped including classes and performances held in a variety of venues across the campus. The last four days were lighter but still would require several hours of shooting.

Dollar signs began to dance before my eyes. \*\*\*

Then Ellie dropped the first shoe. She asked me if I would do the job for the same fee as all the master teachers. Knowing who they were (Paul Trueblood charged \$75 an hour for just accompanying singers, never mind coaching.) I figured I was still okay in the dollars department then she dropped the other shoe. "They each get \$1,500 for the entire nine days."

This affront took me aback. (I've waited seventy-eight years to write that line.)

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At some point when I realized that the parting might be inevitable I told her that I was not leaving our apartment. If I was going to lose my beloved wife I was not going to lose my beloved penthouse, too. Elizabeth called my bluff – which wasn't really a bluff – and started looking for a place where she could go. After a short time she found one, her friend Alice's *pieds-à-terre* in the Murray Hill neighborhood.

EH moved out of our home on Saturday 13 July July 1996. That was the low point of my life.

### **Chapter 31: She's Gone (1996–1997)** **[...after twenty-nine years]**

So there I was, two weeks short of the thirtieth anniversary of meeting the love of my life and she was gone. Words fail me but I'll try a few: Desolate, Devastated, Heartbroken, Angry – after

thirty years as half of a pair I was, again, a singleton. How the hell did this happen to me? How did I let it happen? How did I cause it to happen?

There were no answers. There was only emptiness and a feeling of unworthiness. If the person who knew me better than anyone had rejected me what good was I to anyone else?

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By the time the [first Cabaret Symposium] session ended at 10:00 PM and I'd shut down, labeled the tapes and safetied all my gear, I was exhausted and sweaty from the long day and could hardly wait to get into the shower. A-Ha! But this was also true of several dormitory mates. A group shower in a football locker room is one thing. A group shower at a Cabaret Symposium is – for a straight guy – something else altogether. I now knew what a cute girl felt like when being ogled by the boys. However I took the salacious remarks with good humor and told the men that while I was flattered by their attentions I was definitely not inclined to change teams this late in the game.

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Several of the teachers were songwriters. The most notable of these was Carol Hall who had written music and lyrics for the Broadway hit *Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*. I loved Carol who was possessed of an acerbic humor and a sharp critical mind. Perhaps a tad more protective of the creators' tunes and words than some of the faculty, Carol would brook no improvisation of lyrics. One hapless Fellow began a song and got about four bars into it before Carol stopped her. "What's that lyric again?", she asked. The girl recited and Carol pointed out that those were not the words she sang. I obviously cannot recreate accurately the entire exchange (wish I still had the tape I shot) but one thing Carol said was along the lines of, "Would you say 'to be or maybe not'? I don't think so. The lyricist labored hard and long over those words and deserves respect. By the way, who wrote that song?" The young singer phumfered and finally admitted that she didn't know.

Quietly Carol said, "I did."

If ever a person wanted a hole to open up and swallow them this was one of those times. But Carol's point was well made and there were no more improvised lyrics for the next eight days.

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## **Chapter 32: From Tamberelli to Final Cut Pro (1997–2001)**

[Rooming with Tony & Going Digital]

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By now she [my mom] was in her ninety-third year and still going strong. From the time Elizabeth split I had been visiting her in LA twice a year and was always amazed at her vitality. Every day she took a brisk one hour walk up into the Hollywood hills. When I say brisk I'm not kidding. She was barely five feet tall and I damn near had to jog to keep up with her. And she was resilient. On one of my weekly phone calls when I inquired as to her wellbeing she replied that she was a bit stiff and sore. To my query about the reason she said, "I was standing on a chair changing a light bulb and I fell off." The woman was in her 90s and a fall from standing on a chair left her merely "stiff and sore". Most people her age would have broken at least two bones and a hip!

I'm ever thankful that I have her genes especially when my bike collides with a quickly opening car door.

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Early in 1999 Elizabeth sent me the divorce papers which I signed. I was officially – at age 64 – a bachelor once again. I was not thrilled with my newfound freedom.

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My buddy Phil Sexton [and I] were watching the Rams beating the Titans in the Super Bowl when he mentioned that he'd read that Apple was coming out with a Mac based editing system called Final Cut Pro. This conversation changed my life. About three weeks later (early March 2000) I was the proud owner of a Mac G4 computer and FCP 1.0.

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David Weinstein, hired me to shoot and edit a sales demo for the [*Cabaret Lulu*] show.

“Lulu” was the stage name of David's wife, a comedienne/singer around whom the show was built. A mix of comedy, music, magic and juggling, it resembled classic vaudeville and was designed to appeal to the senior citizen demographic – which it did. \*\*\*

Late in February I \*\*\* shot two performances with two cameras. Then it was time for (gulp!) my first actual Final Cut Pro edit.

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David \*\*\* sat next to me with both the [FinalCutPro] manual and the [“how to”] book open and would look stuff up while I played with the controls trying to make things happen.

He's a cool and surprising guy. When I met him I thought he looked like a banker, all dapper in his three-piece suit. Then he showed up at my place to edit in jeans and leather jacket, sat down and pulled out his stash and began to roll a joint. I assured him that smoking some reefer was fine but I declined his offer of a toke. Trying to learn FCP while stoned would not have worked for me. We spent a lot of time together for a couple of weeks and I got to learn a lot about his multifaceted background.

David had a wild and wooly youth. I may be misremembering some of the details but as I recall he was somewhat of a hippy, doing a lot of mind-altering substances. Then he got into fund raising for various activist causes. At some point he dropped out and bummed around Europe for a while with the likes of William Burroughs and Alan Ginsberg. When he came back to the states broke in the mid-'70s, on his first day home he got a call from a political group that was looking to hire a fund raiser. He needed a gig so badly that he didn't care the color of the politics and thus a former psychedelic refugee joined the team of Ronald Reagan.

Mind you, these stories rolled out over several days with tasty tidbits spicing the conversation while searching for information on how to make an image rotate as it moved across the screen and such like.

Once Ronnie was ensconced at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue our dope-crazed weirdo found himself working for the President of the United States. How bizarre is that?

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By now, after four years of separation, I was very clear in my mind that this woman was my mate and I was determined to get her back. I did not know how but I was gonna do it.

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## Chapter 33: Working at Home (2001–2002)

[A new Era in Editing]

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My entire edit system: G4 with display, video monitor, DV, Hi-8 and VHS decks all fit nicely onto what used to be our dining room table. \*\*\*

The spot previously occupied by our (Elizabeth's) grand piano was now stacked with camera gear, lights, stands etc. The apartment quickly took on the appearance of what it had become, a working bachelor pad. Plants died, piles of stuff began to accumulate. I was never very neat. Clean, yes. Neat, no. My cleaning lady's challenges grew.

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I didn't learn this until quite a while later but the 9/11 event was a major factor in Elizabeth's revised attitude about our being together. I'll let her tell you:

*For the world, the attacks on the WTC on September 11, 2001 were traumatically shocking; for New Yorkers, they bordered on the inconceivable. What happened here?! I was among thousands of the dazed walking north from midtown to the sound of Jet Fighter Planes flying over the city relentlessly. Very strange and ominous. However weird though, this shock offered each of us the opportunity to hold life in a brand new perspective. What's really important to me; moreover, who's really important to me? I wanted to gather all the people I loved to my heart, to my life. Most prominent among this group was Ben. I had to address this.*

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On one of my LA trips we went to see Mom's physician. Doctor Aziz was a kindly gerontologist and he administered an Alzheimer's test. The questions were along the lines of "What day is it?", "Who is President?" and the like. Lucy would answer the question then look at me and roll her eyes as if to say, what's this guy's problem? I think the only answer she missed was the year so she passed the test. When she complained of not having an appetite the doc asked what she really liked to eat. "Pie, ice cream, fried chicken," she replied. This is when Dr. Aziz really impressed me. He told my mother that she was ninety-some years of age and had earned the right to eat whatever she pleased; all the pie, ice cream and fried chicken she wanted.

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By this time (April '02) Elizabeth and I were seeing each other with some regularity: dinners, movies but we were always in public places. \*\*\* I was being very cautious because I felt in my bones that the possibility of a reconnection existed and I didn't want to blow it by being pushy in any way. However sometime in that period I mentioned the fact that we were never truly alone with one another and felt that we might consider some way to remedy that situation. Much to my surprise – and inner delight – she didn't torpedo the idea. And I didn't push for an immediate response, just let the idea sort of saturate the space between us.

Then a couple of weeks or so later with my heart in my mouth I floated the bodacious idea that we should go somewhere together for a few days. Again, joyous surprise; she didn't grimace and shudder. I suggested a few days in Puerto Rico, we'd had a nice vacation there once. She didn't freak out but sensibly suggested that if we went that far and things were not in synch... I had to agree so I let some time go by then suggested a weekend at a B&B in the Berkshires. This idea was met with seeming acceptance. \*\*\* [T]he next day she decided that if things went sideways she'd be "walking down the Taconic parkway" and called it off.

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It had become clear that the only way this was gonna happen was in a very nice Manhattan hotel.

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At 1:15 PM on Saturday June 8th I picked up Elizabeth in a limo with roses and champagne. (I'd also packed a CD player and small speakers so we'd have our music in the room.) She didn't know exactly where we were going, only to a hotel. We took a cruise around Central Park and pulled up in front of the Park Lane [on Central Park South] at 1:45.

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Eric [Brown] had produced (and was playing the leading role in) a showcase of Neil Simon's *Chapter II* at the Producers' Club on 9th Avenue in midtown and wanted two performances videotaped the coming weekend. He asked my availability and price and when I gave him the number he didn't quibble that it was more than he could pay nor did he ask for a discount. He just said, "Okay." This was very unusual.

On 26 and 27 October I shot the shows, which were quite elegantly produced, especially for a showcase. This was no black box stage with mismatched furniture but a fully realized, professionally decorated and lit set that had obviously cost some bucks. Eric did a good job with his role, the other two actors were okay, and Melinda Pinto the woman playing his love interest was excellent and gorgeous.

When I looked at the check Eric gave me I knew why he didn't complain about my price. His address was Sand's Point, a very exclusive Long Island neighborhood where there were no poor people.

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New Years' Eve 2002 was the first one Elizabeth and I had shared in a long, long time. Neither of us remembers what we did but we both remember that whatever it was we did it together.

## **Chapter 34: Creative Entertainment (2003–2004)**

[Friend with Money]

Early in January 2003 I got a call from Eric Brown. He was producing (and starring in) *Plaza Suite*, another Neil Simon play and wanted to be sure I would be available in June to shoot it. I put the date in my calendar and then I had another brainstorm. This guy was a player and might just go for the idea that was percolating in my head.

The next day I called and asked if he'd like to get together the next time he was in town because I wanted to discuss an idea with him. On Monday January 20th he came to my apartment with Melinda \*\*\*. I pitched the idea of making a documentary about the creation of the show – from casting through opening night. They both found the proposition appealing.

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This budget was what we call run & gun, a no frills project with Peter [Longauer] and me as the entire crew, shooting with available light.

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During all this Elizabeth and I continued "dating" – dating my ex seems a strange thing – we spent Friday nights and sometimes Saturday nights together although due to the fact that she had

a queen size bed I didn't often sleep over. But we were growing closer and this made me very happy. In fact with the project, money coming in and, most importantly, being with Elizabeth once again, this was one of the happiest periods of my entire life.

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At some point during the *Nyack to Ninth Avenue* shoot when Eric came over to see some footage he had mentioned that once the show closed he wanted to get together to "pick my brain" about producing. I'd demurred saying that I didn't know anything about theatrical production. But Eric explained that he wanted to learn about movie production, a subject with which I had some expertise. That meeting occurred in 2003 on July 22nd. He asked me how I got started.

So I told him about being "thrown into the deep end of the pool and having to quickly learn how to swim" and the subsequent stories of my on-the-job-training as a production manager and producer. The short answer being that the best way to learn how to be a producer is to produce something, ideally with the support of a mentor.

The next thing he said changed my life. "You have any projects that we could do?" or words to that effect.

I did.

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I'm not certain when Eric committed to producing (and financing) what came to be *Elizabeth Hepburn's Better & Better Series*. \*\*\* In any case I got my first check for the project in February 2004.

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Saturday morning [the first shoot day in North Carolina] I was wired, cranked, over-adrenalined – pick your adjective. By this time in my career I'd run hundreds of shoots, big and small as producer and/or 1st AD and dozens as director. But this one was different. Not only had Elizabeth and I created it from scratch I was in complete charge and had absolute responsibility for the success or failure of the movie.

\*\*\* I didn't realize it at the time but I was so stressed that I didn't give Elizabeth the support she needed but thank god she's a pro and she stood and delivered in spite of it all.

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Elizabeth: *Hair and make-up was being done by Donyale in a small cabin on the grounds. \*\*\* Suddenly a PA was in the room telling me to get to the creek immediately. \*\*\* The next thing I knew I was standing on a rock in the middle of the creek feeling like I'd been shot from a cannon. Somehow we got the job done.*



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### **Chapter 35: Group One Redux (2004–2005)** [Editing Nine Movies at the Same Time]

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During these post-production delays [on B&B] Eric and I began to develop *Birth of the Music Video*. The idea we came up with was to stage a reunion of the five key Group One members.

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At least eighty percent of this [B&B] edit was like a giant jigsaw puzzle, more like a documentary than a scripted movie. Except for Elizabeth's on camera synch scenes – twenty percent or less – the rest was all simply moving pictures. There was no scenario, no visual plan. It was completely up to me to take this copious quantity of non-specific, beautiful footage and create coherence. The pictures had to support what was being said by Elizabeth and relate both rhythmically and conceptually to her expression as well as to the music. I'm so glad that I didn't analyze the task that way when I was doing it. Had I done so I may have become paralyzed by the scope of the thing. I just plunged in without thinking about it very much.

What I did do, both on the unconscious level and sometimes the conscious, was to ask for help, guidance. I'm not talking about praying per se. I more or less abandoned that practice along with my fundamentalism way back in my twenties. Higher Power as they say in the twelve step programs? Inner wisdom? Don't misunderstand, I was not hearing voices nor was I conscious of any external or subconscious influence. But with all the metaphysical/Spiritual training I've had over the last thirty-plus years I've come to accept the concept that hunches, ideas that pop into

my head while on my bike or in the shower, are messages from... The Universe? My Higher Self? My Inner Wisdom? My Guides? The Artist Within? More religious folks might think of Angels. I don't know and it really doesn't matter what label you put on the phenomenon. What I think is important is that you notice, pay attention to these subtle cues. As Elizabeth might put it, "Open one's self to the available guidance wherever it comes from."

I did that. Most of the time it was not conscious and sometimes I'd say out loud, "I need some help here." Most, if not all, of the time I got it.

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Why not cater the [reunion] lunch in a soundstage? I got on the internet, did some research and came upon the Atwater Village Studio (now defunct). It was located about a mile from my folks' former house near Glendale and on the website looked like a really retro studio. \*\*\* It was perfect; like something from the 1960s, full of old Mole-Richardson studio lights, a humongous ancient Moviola dolly and other equipment from that bygone era.

I immediately decided that it was the ideal location for the lunch and the next morning we took Pam [caterer] there to look it over. She arranged an elegant, delicious buffet and supplied everything from the food to the table and chairs.

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Sometimes confluences of events happen in a remarkably favorable pattern. One doesn't usually recognize these synchronicities until after the fact. Such a pair of fortuitous occurrences came about in that happy month.

Eric announced that it was time for us to get an office together in Manhattan.

Elizabeth announced that it was time for her to move back home to our penthouse.

The second of these announcements was a wish fulfilled.

However, immediate action was required. I had been living alone in the apartment for nine years and working in it for nearly four. I was not the neatest guy on the planet and was (then) a smoker so the place smelled of cigarettes. The apartment was filled with gear and hadn't been painted for fifteen years. It had devolved from a lovely penthouse with a beautiful garden into a grungy working bachelor pad. While the trees and large bushes – including roses – on the terrace were still alive, the plants also needed a lot of work. Basically the apartment required not merely paint but renovation.

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Then on Monday the 20th I saw a guy from the landlord's office in the elevator and he casually said, "Pablo will start your painting tomorrow." WHAT!? Tomorrow?!!?? Arrgghhh!

I can write no better a description of the traumatic painting event than I did in [\*Circumstances Beyond My Control\*](#) so here I quote Author Ben Bryant.

*For those of you who dwell elsewhere this may not seem like a big deal but having one's NYC apartment painted is an even bigger deal than moving. When you move you pack everything up and take it out of the apartment. When you get painted you pack everything up and put it in the middle of the floor. And that's just the beginning. Six or eight days of chipping and spackling and dust are the prelude to the primer coat.*

*"Where the hell did I put those whatever?" "Which box is the thingamajig in and what room is it in?" "Christ, there are plaster chips in the damn bed!" You get the idea – and this chaos goes on for three or more weeks. And finally after the longest month of your life it's done. Then you have to put everything back. Fuhgeddaboutit.*

Jeff and I began to scramble. The books were still on the shelves, the pictures, mirrors and paintings still on the walls and they were gonna start in eighteen hours.

By the next morning the living room was ready and Pablo arrived ...

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On Thursday June 23rd I was happily on my way back to LA.

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We rolled the four cameras and the conversation rolled as well... for four hours. It exceeded my expectations and then some. I could have simply cut to whatever camera had a shot of whoever was talking and made a four hour movie that would have fascinated anyone who was a student or aficionado of film history.

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Peter and I arrived at JFK a little after midnight on 30 June, drove home and found a parking spot right in front of our building. Thank you, Jee-zus-uh!

That's the good news. The bad news is that I walked into what used to be my apartment but looked more like a construction site. Pablo and Manuel were still working on the destroyed walls. It would be another week before they even began to spackle then a week more before painting began. In all it took them nearly four weeks to finish the job.

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The hardwood floors needed to be refinished and good ole Jeff volunteered. We rented a radial floor sander/polisher and the Monday after Pablo and Manuel finished we went to get the machine and humped it two blocks up the hill. The thing weighed a ton. Not really but it felt like it.

Once we got it home and plugged it in the fun began.

I watched at first in fright then in amusement as Cowboy Siggins busted the electric bronco and rassed it under control.

Jeff:

*\*\*\* The sander was plugged in and ready to go. Power on! I am not a large person and this machine manhandled me as if I were a rag doll. I did the only thing I could do to control it; I turned the power off. Whew! There was much laughter from all who witnessed this display of machine vs. human. Score one for the machine. I raised the rotating sander plate off the floor and flipped the switch. I gently lowered the rotating plate to the floor. Once more I took off across the floor with the machine having its way with me. Power off! Again much laughter. I was now down, two to zero against the machine. I realized then that I had to man up and get brutal with it. I grabbed it firmly, raised the rotator and flipped the switch. Grasping the handles with an ultra-firm grip, I again lowered the sanding plate to the floor, hanging on for dear life. Success! At least for a moment, then I tried to move the sander into position and again it slipped from my control and took off for one of the walls. Power off! I had had a modicum of success and was getting an insight into the machine. Again I flipped the switch and struggled to find the right grip and angle to control this very powerful opponent. It took me about five minutes to get all the kinks out of our relationship, but finally the machine succumbed to my will and the job was underway.*

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Final touches on Saturday and Sunday dawned warm and clear.

Elizabeth was coming home.

### **Chapter 36: Convivientes (2005–2010)**

[Home Again]

Sunday 24 July 2005 was one of the happiest, albeit exhausting, days of my life.

Nine years and eleven days after Elizabeth (and a couple of her friends) moved her out, I (and a couple of my friends who are hers too) moved her back in.

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In July [07] I was going to the extreme East Side for a cardiac stress test with Fred, my heart Doc. Rain was pouring so I put a clean shirt, shorts and sox in a plastic bag inside my saddlebags and set out on my bike, leaving time to change into the dry clothes before the test. (I had another set of dry duds at my office, including sneakers.)

As I was rolling, happily soaking wet, down the left lane, right next to the sidewalk, of Second Avenue a couple of blocks north of Fred's street I hit a puddle.

A bit of advice about riding a bike in the rain: You cannot tell how deep a puddle is.

This one was a major pothole maybe four inches deep. When my front wheel entered it the bicycle stopped. I did not stop. Well, I did stop actually... soon after my face made contact with the sidewalk.

My helmet and its visor prevented grievous cranial and facial injury. (Don't ride a bike without a helmet!) Severe? No. Bloody? Yes. As all men who shave are aware, even minor facial cuts can bleed profusely. I had several of those plus a quarter inch circular divot in the front of my chin. I must have looked like the survivor of a perilous industrial accident. People on the sidewalk were very helpful: assisting me to my feet, asking if I needed an ambulance etc.

I reattached the helmet visor, got back on my bike and rode to Fred's. His group was in a high-rise building, not a hospital or medical complex so the folks in the elevator gave my sanguinary presence a lot of room.

When I presented myself at the reception desk the young woman looked up from her papers, blinked a couple of times and said, "This isn't an emergency room."

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By the beginning of 2010 Elizabeth and I had been living together – "in sin", as our mothers would have put it – for four and a half years. The subject of remarrying had been mentioned but as much as I wanted to formalize our togetherness I'd not been at all pushy about it. Then one fine day early in the year she said, "I think we should get married."

I could hardly believe my ears. No woman had ever proposed to me before. I'm not sure but I probably cried. (Don't tell anyone.) We set the date for May first and our terrace as the location.

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Our second marriage was truly a new beginning to a new life together. Who knows what that will bring? The possibilities are endless.

Maybe I'll write a book about it. Or maybe Elizabeth will.