

Graduation & Reality Fresh out of high school

The birds of Michigan we encountered almost daily. Michigan has beautiful birds lots of color and they were everywhere at least they were when I was young. Bright flashes of color against the gray grind of growing up. They reminded me that life had beauty, even when work and responsibility weighed heavy. I've scattered photos of beautiful things Most photos either taken by me or while I was present. I've had a wonderful life.



My Lifelong friend Dale Stevens

I met Dale Stevens when I was just twelve, but heard of him before I met him. We played an all-Star game together. He was a third baseman with an arm like a cannon—it was something to watch him fire the ball from his third base position to first. Dale could hit, too. We were only acquaintances then, but by high school, we'd become close friends. Maybe it was because we were cut from the same cloth: hardworking, self-reliant, and proud of it. Dale got a '57 Chevy I think in 1960—the prettiest car around. We both had money in our pockets because we worked hard, and that kind of bond sticks. We've been friends ever since.

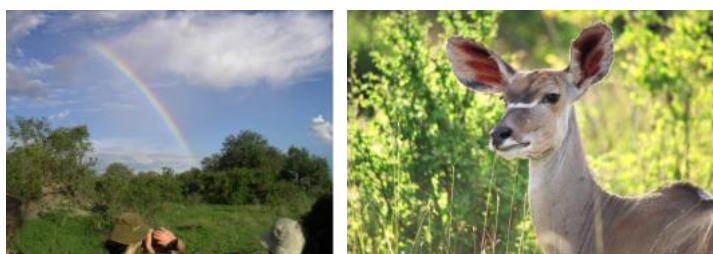
Dale worked for Komarks grocery in the meat department. He went on to become a butcher, own his own grocery store and ended up owning his own chain of restaurants in southern Michigan. He visited me in California for about nine months and helped me dig myself out of a hole business wise and mentally. We have been lifelong friends.



A Lesson in Consequences At eighteen

When I got out of high school and after I was eighteen, I pulled a fast one: scratched off the birthdate on my driver's license to make it look like I was twenty-one. Back then, it was easy—today, not a chance. Dale and I along with a guy named Tom Shaw headed out for a drive with a fresh 6 Pack of beer. I hadn't even taken a sip before I spotted flashing red lights in the rearview mirror. The police pulled us in for drinking on the highway. They tried hard to twist our story to say Tom handed me the beer, but we didn't give in. I got 10 days in jail. Dale—still in high school—got less. Tom drifted out of our life after that, but they couldn't pin him for serving minors. He was 21. That experience taught me the value of owning your actions and standing your ground. That was more than 65 years ago and neither of us have ever been arrested for anything since. 🌟

A Word to the Wise



Here's a lesson I wish I'd learned sooner: go to college, but don't just go—specialize. A philosophy degree is great for expanding your mind, but not so great when your job hunting. Most people end up in careers unrelated to their degrees, because they didn't plan ahead. You can always pivot your major in year one or two of college but waiting too long makes it harder. Planning matters. If college isn't your thing? Trade schools are fantastic. You just need to pick a direction and stick with it. I thought jobs would come easily. I had the diploma, played sports, smiled a lot, I was fun to be around. The Job applications didn't care if I was a nice guy or a team player—they cared if I was qualified, and there were dozens to choose from. I was still doing my extra jobs and making money, But I didn't have any real direction.

📖 Chance Encounters One day, walking to the store,



I decided to take a shortcut through an old horse trail walking to the store. That's when I saw Jackie Cooley, a friend's sister, perched on the fender of a car. She was talking to someone inside with the passenger door swung open beside her. That moment led to meeting Terry Lasher—my first wife-to-be.

💔 Fake Love and a Hallway Smile

I'd seen Terry around school, but we never spoke. One day I was a hall monitor, and she came hurrying through the hallway, late for class. She flashed a big smile and said hello. I said hello back. That was the extent of our words, but I never forgot that moment, as she walked past, I thought, she is gorgeous. Terry had strawberry blonde hair and the kind of figure high school boys never stopped talking about. That day on Lover's Lane, Jackie Cooley introduced us, and we finally broke through the barrier of silence. We laughed about how both of us had been too intimidated to speak before. I was a high school athlete, and she didn't fit into our group. She told me she was going through a rough time, confiding that she'd had a baby with her boyfriend Bill Henry—someone I never liked—and placed the child for adoption. She said it broke her heart, though she knew it was the right thing to do.

Sometimes life puts you in a place where temptation can get the better of you. That evening, one big mistake changed my life forever. Terry flat told me her morals. (Giving up her child)

You will have many chance encounters in your life, think carefully before you act because this kind of thing happens all the time. She was exactly like my sister, maybe that's why I liked her so much. But I would have never wanted to be on the other side of my sister, who took zero responsibility for anything and that is exactly what I did to myself. I changed the rest of my life without any thoughts whatsoever. (My fault not Terry's)

Jackie eventually wandered off, leaving Terry and me alone. We talked for hours—about life, sex, and the things young people rarely say out loud. I admitted I'd only been with someone once before, set up by a friend. She laughed, saying pregnancy had shut her down for a year. That night, we ended up together in the front seat of her car. Not the back. It was raw, fast, and unforgettable.



⚠ Lessons in Temptation

Life has a way of putting temptation in your path. That night, one mistake changed my life forever. Terry was clear about her morals—she had a baby and gave it up for adoption. That didn't align with my way of thinking. She was from the city, I was from the country, our idea of a future life could not have been further apart. My church upbringing had warned about temptations. But at that moment of lust, I threw all caution to the wind. I have paid for that mistake my entire life. You get coached on the basketball court; you put on defensive pads and get coached on the football field; they even teach you to swing a bat and throw the ball when you play baseball. Nobody was assigned to teach me about life experiences. People that don't get taught end up like me. Maybe I would have ended up there anyway, not heeding life's warnings. I was just young and stupid. I never even thought about it; I was just cruising through life without care. Terry had no respect for herself, or she would not have lured me into it. I had no respect for her either, or I would have stepped back and said wait a minute I don't even know you. Everything is your own choice. I never gave my future 1 thought; I Didn't do my future children any favors either They grew up with a mother smoking pot while she cooked their breakfast and a stepfather who thought winning by Intimidation was the way of life. Marvelous examples!

⚡ The Rush into Marriage

We were inseparable—before school, after school, late into the night. I didn't want a single day to pass without her. After three weeks, Terry told me she'd missed her period. My immediate reaction was simple: *"Let's get married."* And just like that, we did.

. We got a marriage license and recruited my friend Danny Messenger and his girlfriend Joan to stand with us. Our pastor married us on the spot, in a half-built house behind the church. Our reception? Hamburgers and sodas at the Sip and Nip drive-in. My parents pulled up mid-meal—probably tipped off by the pastor. They weren't thrilled, but they covered their emotions well and even paid for our motel's honeymoon. I called them the

next day to thank them and shared the news about Terry's pregnancy. They invited us to move in while we got on our feet, and we did.

From \$17 Apartments to \$35 Dreams



Above David was one week Old in our first apt. We started small: a \$17-per-month apartment, followed by a two-story, three-bedroom home for \$35 a month. I was working 75 hours a week at 75 cents an hour, pulling in around \$55 a week to make it happen. We were young, broke, and building life from scratch.

Family Trouble & Personal Turmoil

Around that time, my sister Mary's husband Hollis came home on leave. But instead of another man, My sister was with a woman—and declared herself a lesbian. This was decades before such revelations were met with understanding. Hollis threw her partner out and tried to salvage their marriage, but it spiraled into constant domestic disturbances. The whole town knew.

Up until then, Mary had been “Corky's sister.” Suddenly, I was “Mary's brother.” I loved her deeply, but the gossip was relentless, and my parents were crushed.

The Grind Begins

My first job was delivering cloth diapers and picking up the used ones to take back to the laundry for washing—smelly and short-lived. Then came Kellogg's, thanks to Dad.

I dropped shredded wheat biscuits down the cornflake chute not once, but twice. Shut down a whole lower floor. I quit out of pure embarrassment. Next, I sold Filter Queen vacuum cleaners door-to-door. That job taught me to sell—and I got good at it. I even pitched the commercial model to Kellogg's and got an order for five machines. I thought I hit the big time. Sent the order to headquarters in Detroit with pride. But the company took the credit. They told me I wasn't qualified to speak to Kellogg's. Then two weeks later, they shorted me fifty cents on my paycheck. That was the final straw. I didn't argue—I just walked away. If someone cheats you on fifty cents, they'll cheat you on everything. Months later, Dad told me those machines had been delivered but were just gathering dust in the

warehouse. No surprise. I don't think Filter Queen lasted much longer as a business. Then, I worked at Eaton Manufacturing, assembling hydraulic compressors for GM cars. It lasted a year—until a three-week layoff turned permanent. I got hired by General Motors later, all thanks to that experience on my resume.

That's when I got a job driving a bulk truck for Standard Oil. I delivered heating oil to homes and fuel to a few stations around Battle Creek. I was 21—and for the first time, I felt like a man.



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Marriage, Betrayal, and a California Dream

While Mary's story unfolded, my own marriage began unraveling. Terry left me for a wealthy young man whose father owned a major moving company. She was gone for a month, left me with the kids, and then came crawling back. I took her in. Six months later, I caught her sleeping with my best friend, Ken Swafford. That betrayal stung more from Ken than it did from her. We all sat down to talk. Ken didn't want her. Terry was devastated. I think Ken decided she was like my sister. Yes, she was exactly like my sister.

When you grow up on a farm, the influences are not all around you. Nobody lives next door. The opportunities to stray from bible teachings are few and far between. Once you've tasted the fruit, it's difficult to restrain yourself.

Despite the heartbreaks, Terry and I decided to leave everything behind—start fresh in California.

Uncle Vern, Dads brother, had visited months earlier and planted the seed. "You'll never make anything of yourself here," he told me. "California might not guarantee success, but at least there, you've got a chance." So, I bondowed the rust on the '55 Buick, pulled out

the back seat, laid down a baby mattress, and packed up David (2½) and Debbie (1½). I had \$500 in my pocket, a trunk full of clothes, and a head full of hope. Hellooo California—WOWEEEE!



First Glimpse of California

California took my breath away. The buildings were shiny and new, the streets full of life—it felt like stepping into another world. My aunt Edith and uncle Vern welcomed us warmly. We stayed with them while we got our bearings in San Leandro. Their house perched on a hillside, four stories tall. Terry, the kids, and I stayed in the attic room with wide windows facing the San Francisco Bay.

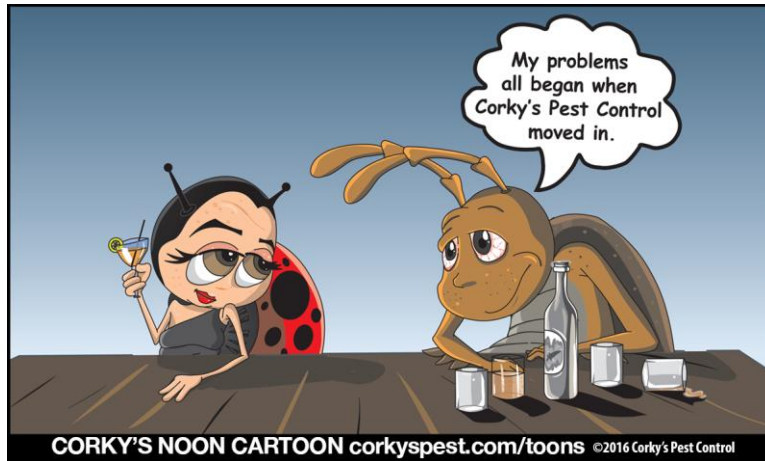
That first night, I couldn't sleep. I watched the city lights shimmer across the Bay, twelve miles of glistening wonder. I stared out at three full freeways, headlights streaming like rivers in opposite directions. The morning smog formed soft tunnels of clouds. But I wasn't thinking about exhaust—I was too busy dreaming of the life ahead.

A Job, and Then the Job I Wanted

By the next Monday, I'd applied for seventeen jobs. The first to respond was to a Flying A gas station. I told the owner I'd only stay until I found something better, and he respected that. After one week, all my applications flooded back with offers.

I accepted the one I'd hoped for: General Motors Assembly in Fremont, California—now the site of the Tesla factory. My Eaton Manufacturing experience gave me an edge, and I was hired to work on the cushion line, fitting springs into seat frames. The job was fast-paced, and because my work was first on the line, every other station depended on me doing it right.

For the first six months, the line barely moved. The plant was still coordinating production, so we spent most of our days waiting—but we were paid well and worked ten-hour shifts with overtime. Eventually, they asked me to join the foreman training program. My supervisor liked my work ethic and put my name forward, along with a guy named Bud Green from our crew.



Settling into Suburbia



Once the line ran at full speed, the hours stacked up: ten hours daily, often Saturdays too. I was making \$36,000 a year, which in 1963 felt like hitting the jackpot. Terry landed a job at Safeway, thanks to her experience at Kroger back in Michigan. Together, we rented a home right across the street from my aunt and uncle—a two-story place with a backyard. We started furnishing the house with garage sale finds and refurbished appliances. My parents visited that Christmas, and for a while, life looked pretty good.



💔 Another Broken Road

Then it all fell apart. I found out Terry was sleeping with her store manager. When I confronted her, she packed up and walked out. I moved to Fremont to be closer to work and raise the kids she left behind. Months later, she showed up asking to take the kids for the weekend. I agreed—she said she missed them. But on Monday morning, she called to say she was keeping them. Said she had a lawyer, and I'd be hearing about child support.

Of course, this was her moral character. The one I should have recognized at our first encounter in that lover's lane. You will have many such encounter moments in your life—think carefully before you act, because all of them will be life altering. Unless you think in advance about what you will do in different situations, you may be led down dead-end roads. I have a daughter who doesn't really even want to know who I am, I have a son whom I haven't spoken to in 7 years. What kind of example did I set for them? Not a good one! Terry dragged me through the coals, and I deserved it for being there in the first place. Terry got the courts to take over, and I really didn't have any ability to change any of it.

I hadn't tried to track her down. I hadn't asked for help. But the lawyer I hired confirmed it—California law gave me no shot. Because I gave her the kids willingly, the court saw no reason to intervene. David was about three and a half years old; Debbie was two and a half years old, and that was that. I think things have changed a little now but not back then.



🪲 Alone Again,



I gave up the house and rented a second floor apartment with a deck over the pool in Fremont. Three months went by, and I lived quietly. Work, dinner, and then just sitting on the couch staring at the wall. I didn't own a TV, didn't want one. I needed time to think. Not about heartbreak or anger, but about how I ended up there. Was it a slow unraveling from the decisions I'd made that day I met Terry. Or from letting other people steer my life, starting back with that football coach? I knew it was on me. My choice. My mistakes. But also, my responsibility was to fix it. I bought a new car Chummed around a little with friends. Maybe a year went by that way sowing myself into my new single life in California.



Meeting Callista

Then one day a neighbor in the building decided to have a party and I was invited. I said yes. That party changed things. At that party, I met Callista Davies—a high school art teacher with a master's degree. She was graceful, magnetic, and completely self-possessed. I watched how she carried herself, how her personality lit up the room. I'd never met anyone like her before—and I still think that's true. She lived in the same apartment with two other schoolteachers. The four of us started spending time together, sharing wine, stories, and weekend adventures. For the first time in a long time, I felt alive again.



Grammar, Grit, and Falling for Callista

Callista and I grew close quickly—evenings of wine, laughter, and good company. Many weekends in Monterey at the Mission Inn Hotel, hobnobbing with extraordinarily wealthy people living on the seventeen-mile drive, and other places. One afternoon she looked me straight in the eye and said, “If you want to hang out with me and my friends, you need better grammar.” Her circle included doctors, professors, and an international jeweler. I was farm-born with what she gently called “hillbilly grammar,” and she wasn’t wrong.



So, I enrolled in English D—nicknamed “bonehead English”—at San Jose State. I dug in and learned. It wasn’t just about fitting in—it was about rising to meet a life I hadn’t imagined myself. Callista, youngest daughter of a multi-millionaire from Phoenix, had been gifted \$13 million at birth, so she’d never know about poverty. She also had a cabin on seven acres near Durango, Colorado. Her wealth was locked in trust, and truth be told, I never cared about the money. It was her wit, her presence, and her beauty—she had movie-star elegance with fire in her eyes. She invited me to her cabin for a week that summer and of course I went.



Mountain Escapes and Melodrama Nights

Her cabin sat on a 60-foot cliff above the Animus River. Small—just about 1,200 square feet—but radiating peace. Across the river, her sister owned 350 acres where *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* would later film their river scenes. The view alone made you feel like you were standing in a Western epic.



Callista spent her summers at the cabin—being a teacher had its perks—and I'd fly out when I could. After two years of dating, we got married in 1966 during a spontaneous trip to Las Vegas. Everyone patted me on the back, telling me how wonderful I was. I felt like king of the hill, just as I had back in high school before coach creep.



Elk Hunters from Michigan

I kept in touch with Cecil and Margaret, Joyce's parents, and invited Cecil and a couple of friends out for an elk hunt. Colorado is beautiful elk country. It was wonderful to tie up with Cecil again, slowly erasing the sting of my first marriage mistake.

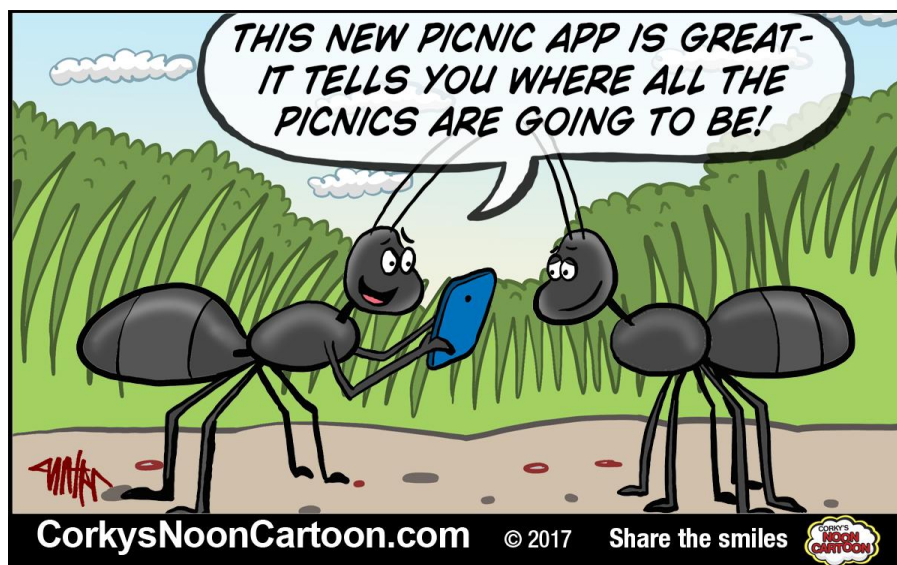


I shot the biggest elk—estimated over 1,100 pounds before dressing it out. We borrowed horses to haul them off the mountain, and Cecil . (left photo) center) brought a refrigerated trailer to haul the meat back to Michigan Except for a few steaks we cut to celebrate, I gave them my share. It was a great hunt. (Callista right photo)

Filming *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*

I bought a rubber raft for the river. The studios borrowed it to film the cliff-jump scene. They destroyed it on the rocks but sent me a check. I hung it on my wall for a month before cashing it.

I also bought a Toyota Land Cruiser so we could explore the mountains. We drove from Silverton to the Continental Divide, camping, fishing, and laughing under the stars. We saw melodrama plays in tiny theaters, sipping beer and howling along with the performers. We pitched our tent by lakes and rivers, waking when we felt like it.



Suits and Stalemates at General Motors

General Motors gave me a shot at advancement, sending me to GMI for training in supervision and public speaking. I wore a white shirt and tie every day, but it never set right with me. I had farm dirt in my soul and didn't feel at home in corporate culture.

I worked as a line foreman and then unloading foreman on the train track docks in material control.

The ASAP Saga

Calling up boxcars for line shortages meant endless paperwork. I got tired of writing "As soon as possible," when ordering boxcars up to be unloaded, so I shortened it too *ASAP*. The conductor asked what it meant. When I explained, he said, "Wow, I'm passing that on to the other Conductors."

Within a week, Southern Pacific conductors were using it. Within a month, it spread across the U.S. That year, I heard it on the radio and laughed, knowing I'd invented it. A friend later searched the abbreviation up on the Internet and discovered a general had used it briefly in the 1700s, but it had died out until I brought it back. Today it's part of the English language. Not bad for a farmer from Michigan.



Finding Purpose in Pest Control

By 1966, I was earning \$46,000 a year—a long way from the \$7,500 I'd made in Michigan. Still, the corporate environment was cutthroat. I knew it wasn't where I wanted to plant my roots.

Uncle Verne was in pest control, and I admired him. I'd done my share of pest work on the farm, tending orchards and gardens. It was a world I understood.

I decided to strike out on my own—not because I didn't respect Uncle Verne, but because I didn't want a partner. I learned door-to-door sales from my vacuum cleaner days. No one else was selling pest control that way, and I saw an opening.

One evening, over dinner with Callista and a fellow teacher, I announced I intended to start a pest control business, and I thought I could gross \$100,000 in my first year. They laughed so hard they ended up on the floor, Calista with a glass of wine in one hand and slapping the seat of the chair with her other. At the time, the average wage was under \$7,000, so my confidence sounded outrageous.

But here's the punchline: that year, I grossed \$100,000 and 18 cents the first year. Absolute truth. I had not kept track, but when the year was tallied, that figure came up. I would never let Callista forget it. (What a coincidence)

That was 1967, in a duplex on Highland Blvd in Hayward, California—the beginning of Corky's Pest Control.



PHOTO OF ME AT FENCE

Calista inspired me in ways I hadn't expected. For the first time in a long time, I felt like I mattered. She came from a world of grace and stability, and I was determined to give her the life she deserved.

My trucks carried an ant on the fender, lassoed by a cartoon cowboy being dragged through the sand. Technicians wore blue cowboy shirts with a red ant embroidered over their pockets. Westerns were big at the time, our techs wore cowboy hats and kids loved it. "Mommy, there's a cowboy at the door!" they'd shout. When you're a hit with the kids and you do a good job, you become a hit with the parents.

Pest control became more than a trade—it was a proving ground. I mapped out neighborhoods in the early mornings and knocked on doors with a practiced pitch, learning to read faces, deflect objections, and close sales with a handshake and a smile. Each annual service sold was a fresh testament to my resilience. Soon, the word spread. I was the guy who showed up even when no one else would. Over time, the business grew, and with it, my sense of purpose. I was building something lasting, not just for myself, but for whatever came next—a foundation laid brick by stubborn brick, fueled by every hard lesson and every hard-won victory along the way. This was not easy.

The Art of the Door Hanger

Calista was an artist. She made a silk screen of a red ant on 11x17 paper. I printed 100 a night, adding lettering the next evening. It was a two-color advertisement—unique and eye-catching.

I used them as door hangers when people weren't home, and business cards for face-to-face conversations. People loved the artwork—some even hung it on their walls.



Cracking the Ant Code

Everyone said Argentine ants were California's biggest pest problem, and they fed on honeydew secreted by aphids. Everyone said ants came into yards looking for water. But I figured out quickly that wasn't true—they were after food. Aphids infested rose bushes, hibiscus plants, citrus trees, and more. Their honeydew was the ants' main food source. If there wasn't another source of water, yes, they would find it in the house, but that was secondary. I knew the three things that every animal needs including ants are food, water and shelter. If I could control the aphids; I could cut off the ants' food supply. That was the key. I didn't realize it at the time, but I had stumbled onto the foundation of ant control in California. I could control the aphids by winter and spring spraying with effective materials.



Later, I figured out how to control spiders. That was a more difficult problem. By cleaning the webs out of the eaves so that I could better get back in the cracks and crevices. Nobody really cared about the spiders until they started coming into the house which of course they did in the fall of every year if they weren't controlled outside. No one thought it was possible to control them, so that was my next venture and of course the reasons why

Corky's pest control became so popular. It was because we'd figured out how to take care of the problems and we did it for everybody, No exceptions.



The Backyard Blueprint; Plan your work then work your plan

I'd been mulling over the idea of the perfect pest control service for a while. One day, I grabbed a pen, a pad, and a six-pack of beer, then sat in my lawn lounge in the backyard. I started sketching out my plan. I realized the most important thing in pest control was having a strategy—something that made me the best and most unique provider around. A boutique service, if you will. If I could prevent ants from coming in the first place, rather than killing them after they arrived, I'd win. And because customers needed ongoing service to maintain control, that was even better. It was a salesman's dream.

Neighborhoods and Knocked Doors

Northern California was all about neighborhoods—block parties, backyard chats, kids playing together. I knew if I won over one customer, I could win over their neighbors too. My background in vacuum cleaner sales and strawberry peddling had trained me well. I was ready to make my mark. I drove a pickup truck to work at General Motors. I had a spray rig installed in my truck and passed my license test. I was officially in business.

A Different Kind of Education

I've never been envious of others. I admire people with money and brains. Being around Calista and her friends was wonderful—they treated me equally, and I admired their intelligence and kindness. Their success made me want to excel in my own way. College wasn't in the cards for me, but I realized I could choose what to learn. I could become an

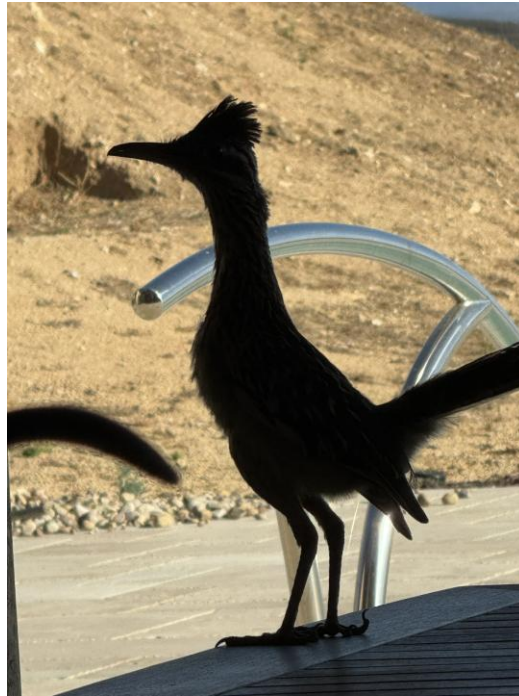
expert in anything I set my mind to. Pest control was going to be my domain—and I was going to master it. Learning from the Best I found a chemical supplier in San Mateo and introduced myself to Norm Ahman, the vice president. I told him I wanted to control insects effectively. Timing is everything—he had just started offering pest control classes to professionals who didn't fully understand the pests they were fighting. I signed up for his Wednesday and Saturday classes. They changed my life. I walked neighborhoods of 100 to 500 homes, knocking on doors and keeping track of who wasn't home. When I made a sale, I'd bring my truck up and spray it right then. After dinner, I'd return to the same neighborhood and knock on nearby doors, saying, "I sprayed your neighbor today, Mrs. Smith. Here's what I charge, here's what I do—can I do it for you?" Half the time, they'd say yes on the spot. I didn't work every night, but when I found a good neighborhood, I'd come back on Saturday to catch the ones I missed.

San Francisco Bay Area neighborhoods were huge usually had entranceways and then maybe 4 500 homes in each neighborhood beautiful homes nice size lots. I built the spray equipment to my specifications so I could spray the homes with power equipment which made it fast to do So I could bring the price down. I began by charging \$12.50 per yard. I couldn't buy trucks and train people to do the jobs fast enough. The money started rolling in.

Owning the Neighborhood:

Common sense rules. A service business only works if your customers are close together. Driving between jobs eats into your profits, what I call windshield time. If you're driving, you're not earning, you're spending and wasting time. Most know this, but they are too lazy to act on it. They try to charge more to make up for it, but then it never works.

With Calista away for the summers, I had the freedom to pour myself into the business. Weeknights and Saturdays became my prime time for knocking on doors—and I loved it. Of course I didn't love it every day. I'd get sweaty and tired like everyone would. But success stirs something inside that keeps you going. Success starts with your own work ethic. Every day, I left the house at 7:30 a.m. and returned around 4:30 or 5:00 p.m., depending on late jobs. That was my rhythm. Evenings were often filled with phone calls, and if I had the energy, I would head back out to revisit neighborhoods where I had done well. I never had a television in my house except a little one in my bedroom on a shelf where I watched Johnny Carson at night when I went to bed.



You have to strike while the iron's hot—

Especially when you know people weren't home for the first time around. Back then, there were no cell phones. You couldn't call on the go. Everything had to be planned and executed with intention. With Quarterly Strategy and Sales Momentum every three months, I'd return to the same neighborhoods. I'd call my existing customers the day before and knock on doors of potential new ones. I kept detailed records, so I knew which houses to skip and which ones had promise. Over time, you start to remember the people and places—it becomes second nature. I worked quarter to quarter, always looking to add more customers. Some weeks I sold 50 or 60 jobs. My best day ever I sold 37. Sometimes everything just clicks—maybe it's the season, maybe it's the pest, or maybe it's just you having a great day. The key is responsiveness. When a customer calls with a problem, you move fast. Anything less might be shared with every neighbor. Anything more? That'll be shared too. I hired a girl to run my office and answer the phone. She also called back people I couldn't get in touch with. I taught her how to telephone solicit, and my business took its first change.

Understanding Rats and the Changing Landscape



These days, rat populations have exploded. Warmer winters mean fewer die-offs, and when food is abundant, rats multiply fast. Rats learn to run along fence tops to avoid the dominant ones. If you see a rat at night, there are likely 50 nearby. See one during the day? You have at least 100 rats. At that point, trapping alone won't cut it. You need bait stations and poisons to bring the population down to a manageable level.

Efficiency Is Profit

The secret to pest control isn't just knowing bugs—it's organizing your jobs. Lining them up on one side of the street, then loop back. Make it look intentional, because it is. Keep meticulous records. When you return, you'll know where to focus and where time is wasted. I'd call ahead or, or have my office help call and say, "Hi, this is Corky's Pest Control. I'll be in your neighborhood tomorrow with my regular customers. While I'm there, I can offer you a special rate." Why? Because if someone else gets in with a good salesman and undercuts your prices, they'll steal your customers. It happens—even when you're careful.

Pricing, Loyalty, and Monopolizing the Block

Organization determines success. Three jobs on one street are worth more than one job across town. I used to discount prices because people love deals. The goal was always to do more jobs in the same neighborhood. Keep your regular customer prices low in large neighborhoods. Don't raise them every year. That way, you retain customers and make it harder for competitors to undercut you. You want to own the neighborhood. Be the only pest control company people think of. If someone calls you from that area, be "Johnny on the spot." Never let it get back to a neighbor that you were too busy to follow up on a recommendation.



Scaling Up and Smart Scheduling

I started with discounted prices for referrals in the neighborhood. I still charged an initial fee elsewhere—otherwise, you don't have a real price structure. But I grew fast. By my third year, I was running about 15 trucks. That kind of growth isn't typical anymore, but I seized the moment. Back then, most companies walked the street with a hand tank, spraying for ants only. Their service charge? \$4. Unbelievable! Customers wanted different service frequencies. I offered 6-week and 12-week programs. That way, I could service both groups efficiently folding them together, so I treated everyone at once. Trouble calls or repeats were handled first or last in the day, or on Saturdays.

The Spider Web Trick

One challenge was spider webs in the eaves. Customers couldn't always tell if I'd treated the area. I wrestled with that until I found a solution: a round brush on a pogey stick. I'd sweep the webs off before spraying, which allowed the treatment to reach deeper into cracks and crevices. When customers came home, the webs were gone. It made a huge impression. I added this service for free, which in hindsight was a mistake—I could've charged extra. It slowed me down by about one job per day, cutting into profits. But it made my service wildly popular and helped me add customers faster than ever.

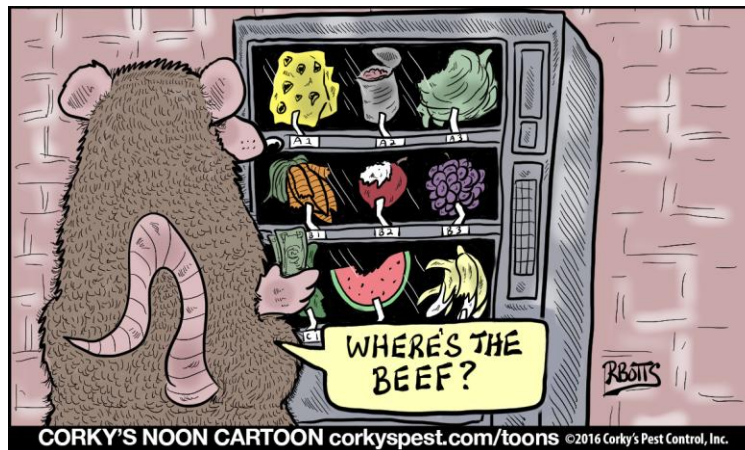
From Doorsteps to Dominance:

Building a Pest Control Empire Adding Value, One Service at a time in business, you'll eventually discover an add-on service that belongs to every job you do. For me, it was the plants—rose bushes, hibiscus, and citrus trees. These were aphid magnets, and aphids fed the ants. To truly control the ant population, I had to treat these plants twice a year. That required an agricultural license, and without it, you were in trouble. Northern California was full of apple, walnuts, peaches, and nectarine trees. These trees need extra care. The best way to handle it is to tailorize a spray rig and hose reel—making it clear to customers that this was a specialty service worth paying extra for. Instead, I opted for a bigger truck and that worked for me for a while.



Scaling Up: The Third Truck Threshold

Once you get that third truck on the road, your evenings start to free up. Saturdays, though, remain sacred for organizing and paperwork. Summer is a different beast—you're a slave to business. Getting past truck number three is tough, and profitability doesn't really spike after three until you hit seven trucks. I've run the numbers more times than I can count. Truck 4, 5, and 6 requires a real office in a real building and someone to run the office besides yourself. By truck 5 you're going to have someone doing some of your paperwork. Truck 6 is a nightmare. Staying with three trucks is your most profitable situation unless you have A glut of new customers coming in and you know you can get past 7 with the area that you're working in.



Why Pest Control Was My Choice

You can build a service business in carpet cleaning, lawn care, pool maintenance—anywhere there's demand. But pest control was the right one for me. It's not just about spraying chemicals. It's about understanding insects: why they're there, how to control them, and how to keep them from coming back. That takes study, discipline, and a willingness to learn what most people avoid. That's what makes it unique; it's not something customers want to spend their time learning and of course it is difficult. The Cost of Diversion and the Power of Focus I was doing well—very well—until I got sidetracked in Japan. If I'd stayed focused on pest control and left the equipment business

to someone else, I might've been a billionaire. I'm nowhere near that now, but I'm retired, comfortable, and alive. That's worth something. Still, I wonder:

What if

I'd had a better education? What if someone had guided me? Would I have listened to it? We'll never know. What if is a game we should never play with ourselves. Financial Discipline: The Real Bottom Line here is a lesson every entrepreneur needs: not all the money in the bank is yours. Pay your bills first. Don't draw out more than you need. Build a cushion. My goal was to have \$1,000,000 in my checking account—not for show, but so I could buy anything I needed at a discount, paying cash. I paid the chemical suppliers immediately. That gave me a leverage. Start with \$10,000 you don't need. Then set your next goal. Attach money market accounts and earn interest. I always have a goal. Business doesn't run on cruise control—it's either growing or shrinking. If it feels like it's running level, be scared. I did get \$1 million in my checking account and kept it there for over 15 years while I kept developing my business. That didn't happen overnight. It took up until the year 2000.



Back to the Beginning

Now that you understand the philosophy behind Corky's Pest Control, let's go back to the start—when I first bought chemistry from Norm Ehmann at Neil A. McClean Company. I was loaded up and ready for my first day.

Superstition and the First Sale

15 beliefs—and I believed I had to sell the first person I spoke to for good luck. The first lady that opened the door said she'd never had pest control and wasn't interested. We talked for a while, and I sold her the job for \$8.50—less than the going rate of \$12.50, but I needed that sale. She stayed with me for 40 years. I never raised her price once, and I made sure my guys treated her like royalty.

The Power of Evening Sales

The first year taught me a lot about pest control sales and service. Three months into my second year I was so busy I had to hire someone to drive the second truck. I didn't have time to sell door to door anymore. Six months later, I bought another truck and hired another tech. I loved spraying yards more than knocking on doors. Across the street, a Southern Baptist minister studying at UC Berkeley told me college kids might want to sell for me. I offered \$3 commission per job. I trained three of them, gave them the pitch, showed them a live job—and let them loose. That night, two sold eight jobs each, and one sold ten—in just three hours. I was stunned. I realized they were selling in the evening when people were home. One of them joked, “This is so easy to sell—you ought to try selling God. That's hard.”

Crushing the Competition

A few months later, a pest control company in Fremont called me. “Are you looking for trucks?” He asked. “I'm selling everything and getting out.” “Why?” I asked. “You've taken all my customers he said.” He was charging \$25. I was charging \$12.50 and doing jobs like an assembly line—10 or 12 on the same street. My technicians could do 15 to 18 jobs a day. His guys were doing 3 or 4. No one could match my price or efficiency. I hired more technicians, more salesmen. I was having the time of my life. I thought I was a brilliant businessman. Truth is, I was just in the right place at the right time with the right idea. “That's how life works.”



Becoming the Expert

I kept taking Norm Ehmann's classes—year after year. I spent more time on his seminars than it would take to earn a bachelor's degree. Probably double that. I attended hundreds of seminars, learning from professors around the world. My education in pest control became excessive—in the best way. Eventually, I wrote eight books on pest control in California and other states. They helped technicians pass state exams and understand the

insects they were fighting. I sold over 40,000 copies. Norm's company sold them for \$65 each—he kept \$30; I got \$35. I even traveled to Buenos Aires to work with a translation company. Several books were translated into Spanish and sold to farm communities for their workers—not to pass exams, but to teach pesticide safety.

Mentors, Ministers, and Mistakes:

Thanks to the people who shaped my path from High School to the University Boardroom

For someone with only a high school education, I consider it a pretty good accomplishment that I spent seven years as a trustee on the “board of Trustees” at the University of California, Riverside—the leading university in the western U.S. for pest control research. It was a full-circle moment: the farm kid turned businessman, now helping guide the future of the industry. **Norm Ehmann: The Teacher Who Changed Everything.** Norm and I became close friends. We traveled the country together, attending pest control seminars and sharing ideas. He had a Ph.D. in entomology and a master's in waste management. His classes were more than education—they were a foundation for my success. Eventually,



Hard facts of life

The company Norm worked for was sold to Van Waters and Rogers. Something went wrong, and they couldn't pay him the millions in stock he was owed. His life turned upside down. After his wife passed, his daughter built a granny flat behind her home, and Norm moved in. I helped finance his autobiography—a book that taught the roots of insect biology and pest control. I even designed the cover. After it was published, Norm passed away. I sold his books online and gave the proceeds to his daughters, who had cared for him in his final years. It wasn't much money, but I did what I could. Norm's life mission was to bring pest control knowledge to the people who did the work. He succeeded. He

certainly did that for me. I think it is important knowing your life was a success before you die.

A Life of Service, Starting with Threaders

Norm's classes sank deep into my soul. They helped me realize my dream: to serve people. I understood the frustration of dealing with household pests and not knowing where to begin. I built the perfect pest control service for residential properties. I taught people how to be in the pest control business, how to treat customers, and how to be safe at doing their job. That desire to serve started early. In high school, I sold automatic needle threaders—a little plastic gizmo that helped people with threading needles with shaky hands and poor eyesight. I sold them to teachers, friends' mothers, and anyone who sewed anything. Back then, everyone had a sewing machine. In my senior yearbook, the staff joked that by our tenth anniversary I'd become a millionaire by selling my one-millionth automatic needle threader. They weren't far off. I was a millionaire when I was 29 and broke when I was 30. (the Japan effect)

My high school family came to see me

The girls were in Vegas having a good time and Margaret called me to say hello. I told her I would send them all plane tickets for the short flight if they would come to see me and I would buy them dinner in San Francisco. They came to see me and spent one night in a hotel, and it was a lovely visit. Joyce was happily married to I believe a peace officer in Battle Creek. Seeing all of them gave me a great homey feeling and I felt accepted again. I took two days off from business and went back to work with new energy.



The Franchise That Could Have Been

I was too naïve to see what was right in front of me. I had invented a whole new way of doing business in pest control. Beautiful residential neighborhoods all over California—and no one ever tried selling door to door or developing an annual service with different treatments throughout the year for shrubs and small fruit trees. The service I built was solid, but the sales method was revolutionary. While I sprayed one house, neighbors watched. Selling them at a discount was easy; they expected a higher price. I thought, "Now I just need to franchise this. I'll be the McDonald's of pest control." But I didn't. That

was mistake number three. I put nine people into business in Northern California, took 10% of their sales—7% for the company, 3% for advertising. I taught them everything: how to do the work, knock on doors, and keep the books. The money rolled in. Two of those people were former supervisors from General Motors—Jeff Peters and Bud Green. Eventually, I opened more than 50 offices across California.

Kent McCulloch: From Salesman to Seminarian

In 1970, Kent McCulloch, a recent graduate from Cal State Hayward, came knocking. He wanted to sell for me. He had charm, personality, and drive. After his first week, I owed him \$656—a lot of money back then. As I wrote the check, he said, “Wait. Now that I know this isn’t a scam, I want to buy one of your offices.” He used that check as a down payment for the San Jose office. That was the beginning of a long friendship.

A Calling Greater Than Business

After a few successful years, Kent asked for a meeting. We’d vacationed together, partied in San Francisco, and were close friends. But I wasn’t ready for what he said. “I’ve had a “calling,” he told me. “I’m leaving pest control to follow my mission.” “Who called you?” I asked. “God.” he said! I was stunned. I didn’t even know Kent went to church. But he was serious—he was going to seminary to become an Episcopal priest. He sold his San Jose office and started a new one in Contra Costa County while attending seminary in Berkeley. He ran the office with little help from me, graduated, and moved to Oregon to be ordained.

I traveled there to attend the ceremony. He was glowing. Kent retired after 30+ years in the priesthood. He now lives in Palm Springs with his third wife. Being an Episcopal priest doesn’t exempt you from marital struggles. His first wife, Carolyn, had not signed up to be a priest’s wife. His second was, well, unstable. His third seems like a keeper. We still meet for lunch halfway between Palm Springs and San Diego. He’s an avid fly fisherman and spends part of the year in Montana where he has his favorite timeshare. One of my favorite Kent stories: he once called me frustrated with the Episcopal Church. “They’re spending money to save whales,” he said. “I like whales, but I joined the church to save souls. That’s our job.” If Kent had stayed in business, he’d have made a fortune. But he chose God. Lucky us.



Inventing the Future

I was only a few years into the business but, I realized no one else seemed to understand how to build an assembly-line-style service business. My time at General Motors had taught me production line mentality. I didn't want my technicians to walk around the truck three times just to turn it on and off. I wanted everything at their fingertips. Of course, I also wanted them to spray every house on the street. I dreamed about how I could make that happen, I knew I couldn't get everyone but how many could I get? Back when I worked for Standard Oil, we used hose reels for gas and oil. I thought, why not use those on pest control trucks? I mounted one on the back, but the hose was heavy—three-quarter-inch high-pressure rubber. Winding it up was a chore. I had some mechanics rig a car starter to a sprocket welded onto the reel. With the push of a button, the hose reeled in electrically. It saved about 10 minutes per job. Thanks to my time at General Motors, I knew how to streamline tasks and eliminate wasted steps. That one change boosted each truck's productivity by two jobs a day. A 250-foot reel of hose and the water in it weighed more than 200 pounds. I drove that truck with the hose reel on it to an industry meeting that night. Back in those days, the meeting started in the bar and then moved to the meeting room. When the guys saw the hose reel up on the side of the back of my truck, they asked me what is that. I told him what it was and what I was doing. With the drinking and the laughter and them picking on me and saying it was the stupidest thing that they ever saw. They believed the truck was going to lean over and break the springs in the truck after a week, and it would be driving down the road sideways because of the hose reel. They were hooting at me all night over that thought. One guy was laughing so hard fell over a table and broke his glass on the floor.

Inventing the pest control hose reel

I never patented that idea but within the next 10 years you couldn't find a pest control truck in the whole United States that didn't have a hose reel boosted up on the back of the truck exactly how I had positioned it on my first truck. Many years later I did the same thing with backpacks that had become very popular as well. They were getting damaged rolling around in the back of the trucks. I didn't patent that idea either. I invented many things about pest control trucks and techniques that made the job easier for technicians which were adapted by pest control companies all around the world. I may not get the credit, but I know where all those ideas came from. It still makes me feel good.

A life-changing gift for myself. 1970

Motorola had been working on radios and developed a new system that allowed a radio to become a telephone using a big box in the trunk of your car. It operated like a walkie talkie by sending the signal to a mountain top where it connected to a telephone which made the outgoing call.

I called Motorola and had one installed. I bought a new Lincoln Mark III Continental. Back in those days there was no communication while you were driving. I'm sure no one these days knows what it was like to not have any communication except your telephones in your office or home. Having a phone in my car and conducting business while I was driving down the road saved me an enormous amount of time. Meeting those people at Motorola would pay off 14 years down the road. I have always kept up with technology. I must have the latest gadgets. "CORKYS RULE".



I had rented a house on the golf course at Castlewood Country Club in Pleasanton CA. with a view of Mount Diablo In the distance. A phone added to that car absolutely made me feel like I was on top of the world. An analysis of my business value so far was the fact I was 29 years old in 1970 and was a millionaire. I had a lot of cash flow which gave me money in the bank to spend. The phone in my car gave me a lot of prestige and being available all the time. It allowed me to expand my business much faster. Now, I was in a three-piece suit having Corky's pest control conventions and directing business operations in 10 offices nine of which were dealerships. So much for not wanting a corporate job. That night my neighbor invited me over for a drink. He was celebrating his achievement of selling 650,000 acres of his property in Northern California, telling me it was his largest transaction so far. It brought me right down to earth. In that neighborhood, I was nobody.

While searching for the right kind of pumps and sprayers to build my new equipment, I ran across stainless steel products from Japan. Norm Ahmann had also introduced me to a lightweight plastic-nylon hose from Japan. It was a gamechanger. I flew to Japan, met with manufacturers, and saw stainless-steel equipment that was perfect for pest control. I thought I'd struck gold. I incorporated a new business: Woody's Chemicals and Scientific Equipment, Inc. I was ready to take my genius into the import business. Yes, I thought I was really smart about the service businesses, especially the pest control business and the equipment that it took to run it. I probably was, but I was also too smart for my own britches. I would find out the world always has a way of showing you how dumb you really are.

I decided to move to Southern California and continue my dealership sales. Calista went to the port area of Los Angeles, rented us a house and supervised the move while I kept myself busy running the business. This would give me a perfect place to start the import business while I expanded my Dealership sales for Corky's pest control.



My Life-Changing Escapade to Japan

I sold my Northern California pest control dealerships for pennies, convinced I was about to make millions. Calista was up for it; she wanted me to head over to Japan and put a deal together. She thought the import business was right where I should be, and I was pumped up for it. I traveled up and down the West coast of the U.S. setting up distributors for the new stainless-steel equipment, pumps and spray equipment. I arranged bank loans from Bank of Tokyo and Wells Fargo Bank to cover the purchases I was to make in Japan.

The Speech That Sank It All

I traveled to Japan and the manufacturers rolled out the red carpet. They had dinner in my honor, and they showed me everything they had. I made deals with them for national distributorships. I knew I was in the right place at the right time. Now, I just had to do the right thing. I bought a cargo load of equipment and shipped it to Los Angeles where I had set up a warehouse. I was so excited the day my shipment arrived. I had bought and set up

thousands of dollars' worth of warehouse racks, to organize the inventory. I spent two days unloading and putting that organized equipment on display. While driving home that night, I listened to President Nixon's speech on the radio. He announced a 10% surcharge on all imports and floated the dollar on the foreign market. I didn't fully understand the politics, but I knew it was bad. The next morning, every distributor I'd lined up called to cancel their orders. My pricing was no longer viable. My dream collapsed overnight. I wasn't a genius after all. I had taken out a \$60,000 loan from the Bank of Tokyo—a massive sum of money at the time. I'd sold my thriving Hayward business for next to nothing. Now, I was stuck. I called around trying to figure out my next plan of action. I didn't think I was operating on a shoestring but actually I was. I just expected that everything was going to go perfectly. I was the one who put up the money and the credit. I was not a smart businessman because I had left no room whatsoever for errors, let alone a national catastrophe and a world that was in political turmoil.

Who would have thought

I knew I had not prepared properly. I didn't have enough income from the pest control business that I had sold to run my organization that had grown to its size. I checked for distributors in Southern California to sell all of this inventory that I had just brought in from Japan. It was all a new thing to the American market, and nobody was willing to take a chance unless I gave them a real deal. The deal was about 10 cents on the dollar. I had leased two El Caminos for the new distributor business. I used parts from the equipment that I had just imported to build two pieces of equipment to put on the back of the El Caminos. I could start a new Corky's pest control office in Southern California. This would give me some income and maybe I could stabilize myself.

The Cost of Secrets and the End of a Marriage

I didn't know how to tell Calista. I carried the weight of failure in silence, and that pressure cracked our relationship. We began to argue—something we'd never done before.

She left for Colorado for the summer. As I watched her go, I knew I might never see her again. One day she called, ready to come home. I told her not to. I could hear the disappointment in her voice. She said "OK" and hung up.



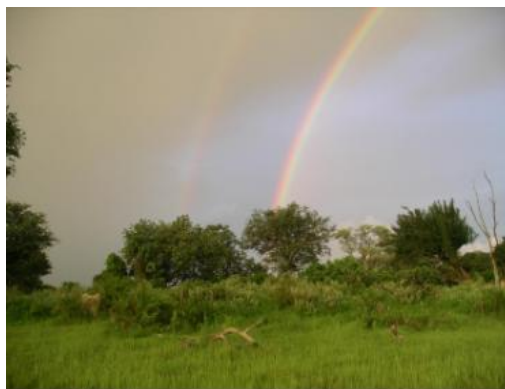
A Free Spirit and a Painful Goodbye

Calista was a free spirit. She had boyfriends now and then but never flaunted it. I visited her in Colorado a few times. Once, I ran into one of her boyfriends in a bar—he wanted to fight me. Calista grabbed him by the shirt, said something I didn’t hear, and he left.

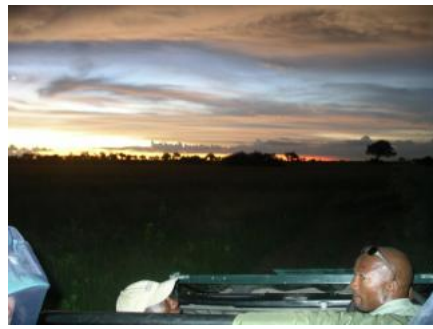
Another time, I drove 15 hours to her sister’s cabin. She didn’t expect me. She introduced another guy who was there as a friend of her sisters but he left right away. Calista believed sex was just sex—separate from love and marriage. I’d already lived through that in my first marriage. I couldn’t do it again.

I still believe the divorce was more my fault than hers. I paid more attention to business than to her. That was divorce number two. I thought I’d take it easier this time, but I was wrong. The pot of gold had evaded me and if it was my fault or not, I felt really low.

Lessons in Failure



I have made so many mistakes. Where were the plans for this marriage? Where were the fallback positions in case something went wrong? I had none. I was now married and divorced twice, and I was just 30 years old. I was so naive when I was young, I thought I was going to marry Joyce Sivits, and she'd be the only woman I was ever with. Now I looked out over life's landscape and thought that I would never get married again. Ever!



I didn't turn to God again then either even though all the signs were there. This is how you go through life wearing blindfolds and ear plugs. If I were to ask God for help, he would have helped me but though I plodded on instead.