

# *Resilience*

*A story of loving, letting go, and  
rebuilding.*

by Angela Jackson

# The Beginning

As I walked down the aisle at my Disney wedding, preparing to marry a wonderful, kind, and loving man, I had no idea what my life was going to entail. I knew I was excited, in love, and open for anything, but what I found out was that I was about to go on a journey unlike anything I had ever experienced. Not only a journey of fun, and excitement. But a journey that would include self exploration, death, near financial ruin, and rebirth.

There were signs that I ignored while Bob and I were dating. He would drink a little too much red wine, He chose to work 6-7 days a week, and had a monumental, dysfunctional relationship with his children. And yet, I said I do. And would do it all over again. This journey is mine and is so rich with value I wouldn't change a thing.

Bob was kind and open to learning things that for some might be uncomfortable. I was driven and committed to whatever I was doing in the moment. And from 2001-2013 I was obsessed with dog agility. I trained with World team members, took every seminar I could, traveled and showed most weekends, and had at least 2-3 dogs at all times. This is what Bob was walking into.

Though at first being a bit uncomfortable with dog life, Bob adjusted quite well. He came to love the dogs and the lifestyle. I would catch him talking to them and slipping food to them while he was cooking. We would take them for walks all at the same time. However, he drew the line with having them in the bed.

Beyond that, he enjoyed having them around. We took them everywhere with us. Early on in our relationship we even bought an RV so that we could travel easier and go to even more dog shows. He loved the RV trips. He enjoyed driving, and figuring out how things worked. He also figured out he could still work as we traveled. Bringing the internet router, he worked wherever we ended up.

Bob was very nudging and accepting of my dog show friends. And they embraced him as well. After a day of showing we would sit outside the RV with a glass of wine, talk and socialize with the dog show people who were just as crazy as I was about this oddball sport. And at one point I even got Bob in the show ring to run one of the dogs. It didn't go as that well, and my hopes for him running his own dog one day were quickly diminished, but at least he was open trying to.

December 2013, we rented a cabin in Tennessee to visit family for Christmas. The ultimate Country Christmas. No dog show, just a vacation. We had been together for 8 years, married for 4. Bob was great with my family. I was super excited about the airbnb we rented on 18 acres. There was room for my 3 Labs to run. The house was gorgeous. Like I said, a perfect Country Christmas. What I didn't know was this would be the last time things would be perfect let alone "normal".

Bob was irritable the whole week we were there. I remember being annoyed with him and thinking how in the world can he be in a bad mood when all around us is nature, beauty and Christmas for heavens sake. On a normal day in Orlando, when he would get stressed he would usually go into work. That was his stress reliever. He loved figuring out problems. He would find opportunities when it looked like there were none. What he didn't know was he was about to have a problem that he wouldn't be able to figure out and one that would take over.

Our vacation was over and we finally loaded up the mini van, dogs in toe and headed towards Route 75. I looked over at my still grouchy husband and noticed the whites of his eyes were not glistening. Not only were they not glistening, they had a yellow tint to them. We finally got home, drug ourselves and the dogs out of the van and went straight to bed. I would unpack the van in the morning.

Bob went straight to work that morning. I got things organized from the trip. My hope was he would feel better getting back into his office and feel “productive”. He didn’t. He actually went to the doctor that same day before coming home and said they were going to run some tests. The next week dozens of tests and scopes were done. Then we got the diagnosis. Pancreatic Cancer.

I was numb, in disbelief, convincing myself he would figure out this problem just like every other problem in the past. We would get through this, and come out the other side a power couple that “beat” cancer and then later help other people.

Like every problem, Bob dove in head first. Researching every spare minute he had. He weighed options of what would work, and what would be best for him if it didn’t work. He continued exploring different avenues and different doctors. The one thing that was never spoken about was what if none of these options work. I was trying to be miss positivity and super supporter, so I said nothing that might sound negative., all the while watching my 185 pound husband drop down to 130 pounds right before my eyes. Still cheerleading, still supporting, and feeling heavy and sick inside.

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After tons of research, he decided to do an alternative therapy called IPT. We found a place in Surprise, Arizona just outside of Phoenix that offered what he wanted. His research was intense. He demanded to talk to every doctor there. His life was at stake. I supported as best I knew how. I found a place for us to stay. A place that would accept our 3 dogs and us for 3 months. This place I found just happened to be a Friesian horse farm.

I grew up with horses but I left home when I was 17 and hadn't been around them since. I was 46. But what I noticed when I saw them was grace, beauty, and calm. Instinctively, I knew we were in the right place for what was about to happen. And through these horses and this place I would be ok. I prayed the same for my husband.

His sessions were intense He felt sick and weak most days. Feeling helpless, I would find myself going outside and looking at these giant, black, beautiful creatures. I could see that beyond their physicality was a calm, sweetness inside them. The way they were just being. Some were curious and playful, others were content. There were older ones, and youngsters. And yet they were all one herd. Accepting where they were and accepting they were together. I began to accept where I was too, with my sick husband and 3 dogs in this 113 degree weather, looking at these beautiful creatures that had so much to teach me.

As Bob's 3 months were coming to an end, his numbers were looking better. We were on the right track, so we thought. We drove for 4 days. Getting back home, Bob went straight to his office, putting himself in the same workaholic situation while researching still at home at night. It began to consume him. He weighed himself everyday, sometimes twice a day. He bought supplements. We ate special diets until he read somewhere that what he was eating was wrong. Then I would throw it all out, and get different food. It became frantic and he absorbed it all. I couldn't blame him. He was doing all he knew to do. And it was starting to take a toll. The stress of being "sick" was almost worse than the diagnosis itself. The what if's, the not knowing, the struggling to find the right thing was literally killing him. He tried everything. And almost 3 years from the day we went to Tennessee my husband left this earth.

# The Middle

I wish I could say, as much as he planned when he was here, he planned for when he was gone. But that wasn't really the case.

Yes, some things were taken care of, but a lot was not.

I was left with a failing business with 16 employees that I felt responsible for. Bob was the business, and without him it was not running well. Truth be told, it had been declining over the 3 years he was sick. And now with him gone, it was going down quick. I was never a part of the business and knew nothing about it. Not to mention, I had just lost my husband and was in no shape to do anything. So, right away I hired someone to run it. After a year of doing nothing but grieving I was catapulted into learning the ins and out of real estate appraisals. I also learned the office manager wasn't paying payroll taxes. I owed the IRS \$80,000.00. The people in the office were not getting along. The guy I hired wasn't telling me things until they were completely out of hand. So, it was time to really kick it in gear and figure things out. Funny how the universe tells you it's time to move. I fired the office manager, I let the guy I hired leave this mess he helped create. And I learned the business the best I could to hopefully sell and get out from underneath it. This was a time I ignored all insecurities and self confidence issues that would normally plague me and just moved. It is amazing what you can do when you are up against a wall. I imagine that is what Bob was feeling during that 3 year time.

After about a year of that, I finally got the business to a place where someone was interested in buying it. And when I say buying it, that really meant giving me a small gift and taking care of the appraisers.

I have heard through the grapevine almost all those 11 appraisers left, and I can let that go now. We are all on our own journey and are not responsible for anyone else's path. I think I felt I needed to take care of them for Bob. What they actually needed was to become who they were without Bob. As did I.

So who was I? I had stopped showing the dogs, and sold the RV. It was too painful to have that life without my husband. Then, I remembered what brought me peace and comfort when I was in Arizona. Horses would become my haven. I started volunteering at a horse rescue farm when we got back from Arizona and found myself going there a lot. I ended up adopting a horse of my own and kept it at the barn. My show dogs became farm dogs. I would take them with me to the farm and they would run and visit these "ginormous dogs" that they would soon learn were not dogs at all. These creatures would try to kick you if you barked and tried to herd them. But quickly they respected them as horses and all got along.

I always felt I was independent almost to a fault, but now there was such a void. And there was no instruction book for how to be a widow in your 40's. As I watched most of the money Bob had left me go to the IRS and to all the other expenses I felt this nagging sensation to build something. Not only, build something, but make it mean something. I heard in my mind, "Make what you went through matter." And so I did. Or am doing...



The bank was after me for the building that was supposed to be my retirement and nest egg. You see, without the business being in the building anymore the bank said I broke the contract of the loan and they wanted the remaining balance of the mortgage paid immediately. I immediately put the building on the market. I put the bank off for 3 months, ignored nasty calls and letters as best I could. I had a sale pending 5 times. There were zoning issues. There were parking issues. Commercial real estate in a residential neighborhood made some neighbors angry enough to go to the City and complain. I was beyond stressed. I kept dropping the price as the bank kept inching closer and closer to me. And finally a group of contractors bought it "as is" for next to nothing. I still haven't been able to drive by it. I'll get there one day.

The little bit of money that I did get from the sale was enough to buy a run down mini ranch 2 doors down from my own house. My thought was, what if I bought this place and made it into a place where people can learn about horses and discover themselves? What if I could introduce horses to people who were going through tough times like I was back in Arizona? What if those horses could make a difference in peoples lives for the better? It could be a haven of some sort. Heartland Haven. And from there Heartland Haven LLC was born. It is in its infancy stage for sure. But I have an Airbnb on site for people to stay, and have horses for people to meet.

Not sure what is going to happen in this life for me next, but what I do know for sure, good and bad I think I will be able to handle it.

# Not the End



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