

Chapter One

Alan stood outside in the backyard. I could see him from the kitchen window as I prepared dinner and glanced out occasionally across the valley. It was one of those beautiful, clear, sunny days in southern California, and I hummed as I worked.

Suddenly the kitchen door slammed. I turned to see Alan come into the kitchen with a troubled look on his face.

“Hurry with the dinner, and get the kids to bed as early as possible. I want to talk to you,” he said.

Now I knew why he had had more than his usual amount to drink that day. He had something important to say, and he felt he needed some additional courage. Immediately I stopped humming. I felt my body becoming numb and then flushed. I guess I knew what was coming.

“All right,” I agreed, but my voice couldn’t help quavering a bit. Nervously I went about finishing dinner preparations. We ate, only the children seeming to be oblivious to the tension. I did the dishes and then hurried the children off to bed, tucking them in absentmindedly.

In the kitchen once more, Alan and I sat down at the kitchen table. We looked nervously into each other’s eyes for what seemed an eternity. I noticed tears forming in Alan’s eyes. He fought them away and then, with his hands tightly clenched on the table in front of him, he spoke.

“I want a divorce. I don’t love you anymore. I don’t know that I ever really loved you. Maybe we got married too young. The kids are in my way. I - I don’t love them either. I’m leaving. I want out. That’s final. I just want out!”

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I sat there stunned. I thought of the summer in Maine when Alan and I had first met. It was during the summer vacation just before our senior year in high school. We were young, impressionable, and fell in love with the thought of being in love, I guess.

We had come from totally different backgrounds. Alan came from a fairly strict Baptist family in Massachusetts. I came from a Catholic family in New Hampshire.

We had dated for three years after meeting that first summer. We became engaged, but broke the engagement three times before our marriage in July of 1967. We had had so many religious differences that our marriage seemed doomed to fail. Alan refused to raise any children we might have as Catholics because he didn't believe in the teachings of the Catholic Church.

As a child I had had all sorts of questions about God, but since I had been told to believe, I had done so blindly. However, I finally decided to leave my religion for the sake of our relationship. After all, I reasoned, I wasn't leaving God, just a religion.

Within three years of our wedding we had two children, a daughter, Sondra, and a son, Derek.

Shortly after Derek was born, Alan's company transferred him to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. While living there I decided to join the Baptist Church. On the way home from church after my baptism, we stopped at a store for some cigarettes and beer. We reasoned that all Baptists drank and smoked - but not in front of each other. That was how we rationalized what we did. We couldn't understand how anyone could have fun without drinking or smoking.

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Fourteen months after arriving in Pittsburgh, Alan received a notice of a transfer to California. He learned that if he did not take the job, he would have to leave the company. What were we going to do?

We had already discovered that things were not going well between us. We had just been existing together with no strong feelings. Since Alan had to leave within two weeks for a company meeting in California and to decide whether he would take the job or not, it was decided that I should fly home to visit my parents, take the children with me, and do a lot of serious thinking about our life together. We were both to do some thinking about our marriage. Did we want to make it work? Would I go to California and make the best of things?

After being separated for a week and doing some soul-searching, we both decided to try to make a go of our marriage. I was a little afraid of going out to California and being so far from my family, but both Alan and I decided we had too much invested together in life to toss it aside now.

We went to California where we found a beautiful home. Before long we were living like the typical southern Californian. However, shortly after getting settled, unpleasant things started to happen. Many nights Alan didn't come home until early morning. This happened time and time again. Our marriage simply existed. But I knew it couldn't last like that. So the night when Alan confronted me about a divorce, down deep I had expected it.

"I love you, but I can't bear to be married to someone that doesn't love me," I said to Alan. "I want nothing more than for you to be happy. And if you are not happy here -

GOD NEVER SLEPT

then - you - you - should leave.” The words were out. But they weren’t really my words. The Lord must have been giving me strength. Normally I wouldn’t have acted this way at all.

Alan went into the bedroom to pack. When he came out with his suitcase in hand, he set it down and jokingly said, “I left you the good hair dryer.”

He seemed to hesitate then and look about the room.

“Why doesn’t he leave?” I thought.

As if in answer to my thought, Alan said, “I don’t want to leave you alone like this. I’ll ask the neighbors to come over and sit with you for a while.”

Our neighbors were out. Alan called several places trying to locate them. When he found them he told them he was leaving me, and he hoped they would come over and stay with me for a while.

I couldn’t understand why, if he didn’t love me, he was so concerned about leaving me alone. Why did he stay until the neighbors arrived?

The next morning at seven o’clock Alan called on the telephone. “I’m sorry,” he said. “I made a mistake. I didn’t mean what I said. May I come home and talk?”

I felt emotionally and physically exhausted from the night before. Besides I didn’t feel we could really talk because now the children had come into my bedroom, so I suggested that he come over after Sondra had gone to school. I said I’d get the neighbors to watch Derek. Then we could talk freely.

When Alan arrived, we sat down at the kitchen table. “I know I am not an easy person to live with. I know that I have made a lot of mistakes in my life, but I can’t turn my

GOD NEVER SLEPT

emotions off and on that easily after the way you hurt me last night,” I said.

Since he had to go out of town on a business trip that couldn't be postponed, he wanted my answer about getting together again before he left. “Could we possibly start over again?” he asked.

I couldn't make a decision that fast. “I need some time to think,” I said. So we parted, not knowing just what would happen to us.

While Alan was away, I decided to see a marriage counselor. I knew that Alan was a firm believer that people should handle their own problems and not air them with strangers. But I felt I had to talk with someone about our problem.

When Alan returned and asked for my decision, I said, “Before I make a final decision about taking you back, you have to agree to go with me to the mental health center for counseling.” By the look on his face I knew what he was thinking. But he agreed at last.

“OK, I'll go, but I don't think there's any reason for it, and I think the whole idea is stupid.”

By the end of the session I had decided myself that these sessions were going to get us nowhere. However, I finally decided to take Alan back and try again.

I started going to church with some friends of mine every week. The closer I got to the Lord the more I began to realize that Alan had a drinking problem.

I had really enjoyed our parties and drinking. But I didn't drink day after day the way Alan did.

GOD NEVER SLEPT

“Please get some help. You have a real problem!” I would beg him, but he wouldn’t listen to me.

He didn’t go to church anymore, but I was determined to continue to go. I didn’t know much about God or the Bible, but I did know I felt a strange sense of peace and security when at church.

Our next move took us to Oregon after we had lived in California for two years. We continued our usual life-style of partying and drinking and smoking. We would be at a party or off in our own little make-believe world of drinking, smoking cigarettes and a little marijuana as well.

True, the life-style in Oregon was much slower paced than what we had grown used to in California, but we still found excuses to drink and party. And Alan drank more than he ever had before.

I realized that I, too, was beginning to drink quite a bit on my own. Having basically a weak character, I blamed Alan for my drinking. But now I know it was my own fault, and my way of dealing with a situation I couldn’t cope with was to lay the blame on another.

“Alan, please, do something about your drinking! It is starting to scare me. I wish you would admit to having a problem for the sake of our marriage.” I tried to convince him, but as far as he was concerned there still was no problem, even though it had now been about eight years since he’d gone a day without a drink.

“Please, at least think about it a little for me,” I begged him.

I was getting scared because of my own drinking, and I was beginning to hate him for his. I was also tired of making

GOD NEVER SLEPT

excuses to the children for all the broken promises he kept making to them. I was tired of trying to make him look good to them all the time.

Our partying continued, and when Alan was gone on one of his business trips I spent the time deciding that when he got back I would ask him for a divorce.

I talked to my boss, who was a level-headed fellow. He said, "I think you're making a big decision too fast. If Alan and you have made it for almost eleven years, you must have something going for you. You should give serious thought to what you're planning to do."

I did decide to wait for a while. And then something happened which began to change our lives completely.

One night as Alan and I were sitting in the living room, we heard a knock on the front door. I opened the door to find a woman standing there with a loaf of homemade bread in her hand and a smile on her face.

"Hi," she said, "I'm Alice Rogers, your new neighbor. We just moved in across the street, and I thought I'd introduce myself to you."

"Why don't you come in," I invited, stepping back from the door and motioning her in.

"I brought you some homemade zucchini bread," she said. "I feel it's a good way to break the ice when meeting new friends."

I thanked her for her thoughtfulness, and then asked, "Are you from Oregon?"

"No," she laughed, "from California. But do I hear a faint accent when you speak? Where are you from?"

GOD NEVER SLEPT

“Originally from Boston,” I said. “Actually I come from a small town just outside of Boston. I always say Boston though. If you haven’t lived there, you wouldn’t know the little town where I’m from.”

Alice persisted. “Where did you actually live? I lived in a little town called Stoneham, and I worked in the New England Memorial Hospital for three years. I just might know the little town where you lived.”

“What?” I gasped. “You lived in Stoneham?” I couldn’t believe my ears. “Stoneham is where I am from. I grew up there and graduated from the Stoneham High School. I - I can’t believe this. Imagine having someone move in right across the road that lived in the same town that I grew up in!”

That set the pace for an evening of conversation that made us instant friends. We learned we had much in common.

Alice and her friend, accepted Alan and me from the beginning. They never made us feel uncomfortable or said anything about our drinking or smoking. They accepted us for what we were.

A few months after we met Alice, we found out that she was a Seventh-day Adventist. We didn’t know much about her religion, but never asked either. Alice never mentioned her faith or tried to push it on us. She just set a good Christian example being there when we needed her, never judging us, never putting us down for the way we lived - and she loved us the way we were!

One day when I told Alice what I planned to do about my marriage, she said, “Sharon, I think you’re making too big

GOD NEVER SLEPT

a decision too fast. Don't you think you could maybe talk first instead of going through with these divorce plans?"

"No, I don't think so, Alice. This has been going on for too long now."

"I wish you would reconsider. I wish I could get you to talk to a man I know. His name is Jones, Mike Jones."

At that time I still was totally convinced that I was doing the right thing. "I am going to ask Alan for a divorce when he comes home," I said. "I have to pick him up at the airport when he returns in a couple weeks."