

Bye Old Barn

by Marie Hayek

I'm heading west down 90. It's hot, and the sun is setting. I should be happy, excited, or at the very least relieved. I'm finally getting rid of it, but I feel a little numb. The cell phone vibrates and it's my friend Becky. I'm not in the mood to talk to anyone, but I'd better take it. She talks about an appointment she has in downtown Houston; that's when the sadness creeps in. I squeak out, "I can't talk," and then the sobs come. What the hell is wrong with me? I've unloaded a huge burden.

I pull into the driveway and remove the lock from the gate. The new owners won't be needing it. I'm sure they'll probably put up solar gating. I stop at the old barn. I pick up some of the boards that the old barn seems to be shedding a lot more of lately. I open the old door and look in. The memories flood my mind.

Old barn, our introduction was a little rocky. You see, I was going to school full time, working 32-hour weekends, and trying to stabilize some sort of life for our family. I would leave at 5:30 a.m. Monday through Friday, drive to Wharton for classes until 11 a.m., then drive to the University of Houston for classes until 3 p.m. I would then drive to the medical center in downtown Houston for clinicals until 10 p.m. It was on one of these nights that I was greeted by my husband Donald who was sitting on the porch steps. He was waiting at home for me at around midnight.

Something had to be seriously wrong since he was on the front porch. Oh my, this was not going to be a good discussion. I experienced a little heart rush and sweaty palms as the thoughts raced through my head. Is he leaving me? Are the kids O.K? Did he lose his job?

Actually, he was so excited, and he was more than elated to tell me, “I purchased for you a creek, a river, a couple of hills, and oh honey, I even bought you a really cool old barn.”

I was not excited or elated about the purchase. In fact, I was angry. Where was the money going to come from? I really did not need a damned old barn in my life.

Yes, you damn old barn, you saw a lot and you definitely heard a lot.

Old barn, you heard my children’s laughter as they played, explored, and looked for antique bottles in the creek beds. As they grew older, you met their boyfriends and future husbands. You met our grandchildren and witnessed us taking pictures of them in the bluebonnets. You watched a lot of bonfires, kids roasting Kasper sausage, fishing, skeet shooting, and just good times.

Old barn, you also saw a family walking to the fishing pond with cane poles. You heard a lot of screaming when a tarantula dropped on Donald’s back, and him yelling, “Get it off me,” Then he started running and yelling, “Get away from me” when I ran behind him trying to spear the tarantula with a cane pole.

Old barn, you witnessed Donald teaching Tania how to drive a stick shift. You watched as Donald also patiently taught her how to get her vehicle unstuck from the mud.

Old barn, you also provided shelter to Donald’s chicken snake that he decided to keep, just to see how long chicken snakes live and how long they really did get. Did you know that

chicken snakes ate chickens from the grocery store whole? Yes, every week that damn snake got a grocery store chicken. The sons in law were a little uncomfortable about this, but it did keep the snake from eating the deaf cat that Donald also kept in the barn. Did you know that snakes climb trees and would lie in the top branches during the summer where it's cooler? That really made us all want to walk leisurely in the woods.

Old barn, you heard a lot of bantering from your co-owners. That was just how we communicated. How many times did you hear "Open the damn gate," "Close the damn gate," and of course, "You have to move a little faster when you're working cattle." Men do not talk nice when they are working cattle. Women walk off in a huff after throwing a hand gesture when they've had enough.

Old barn, you witnessed Donald and the kids fix water gaps. Once when the creek was flooded, Donald tried to get Tamara to sit on the railroad tie as he pushed it toward the gap. Tamara told him, "Oh hell no!" Donald got on the tie and tried to ride it Huck Finn-style toward the gap. Sometime later, Tamara found him walking out of the woods, with no boots, completely soaked. He had also lost his glasses in the creek during this adventure. He did find them the next day with the help of a metal detector.

Old barn, I did enjoy mowing the pastures around you. Donald enjoyed bossing me around. He would try to tell me how he wanted the pastured mowed, and I would act like I couldn't hear him. This would really irritate him, and I really enjoyed irritating him.

Old barn, you were there the day I was mowing the bottom end of the pasture, and I was alone behind a tree line. I decided to even out the farm hand tan on my arms and neck to include

my back and shoulders. I looked around, and I was sure that I was out of sight from the top of the hill. I removed my blouse and mowed for a couple of hours in my bra. I put my blouse back on before driving back up the hill. Old barn, you heard my husband and kids enjoying a good laugh at me. They had binoculars.

Old barn, you were there when things started to turn a little dark for us, and we needed to make some serious decisions. You were there when Donald tried to teach me everything I needed to know about you and the cattle. Donald was also spending a lot of quieter times with you. I'm sure you heard his prayers and witnessed his fear.

Old barn, you were there when I tried so hard to keep things going and stood strong the night I realized that I couldn't handle ranching without him. It had been a busy week at work, and I was unable to get out to you. The cows had not ever gone that long before without being checked or given cubes. It was cold, dark, drizzling, and the cows were not greeting me at the gate. The cat wasn't there either. I thought of that damn snake and how it was not getting its weekly chicken. You felt so solid in the dark as I held onto your corner, nauseous.

That was the night I mentally surrendered you.

You see old barn, I was never mad at you, and it wasn't that I didn't want to be your owner. It was just the timing. I think that sometimes I was also jealous of you. Donald sometimes spent a lot more time with you, but time has a way of turning things around.

I threw an old ladder that was lying on your floor into the back of my truck, removed the last lock, and I drove away.

Bye old barn.