

*Prologue*

I began experiencing symptoms of depression when I was a junior in college at UC Santa Cruz in 1991. I didn't recognize what I was experiencing as depression. I never put a name to the feelings. I had transferred there as a junior and was studying Environmental Studies with a focus on Policy and Planning. I enjoyed my classes and I enjoyed doing research and writing my papers, but sometimes I felt weird and extremely self-conscious walking around that beautiful campus, especially when I was alone.

I would wear long skirts, occasionally dressing like a hippie because even though I was born in 1970, I listened to the Grateful Dead. My best friend Christine would drive over the hill to visit me, and we would frequent our favorite Capitola coffee shop called Mr. Toots. One time we walked into a beachfront Capitola restaurant with live music playing. The staff moved some chairs aside so we could dance to who we later believed was the guitarist from the Doobie Brothers. All in good fun.

I had three roommates my junior year, two of whom were also named Jennifer. I went by Jen, the other two were Jenny and Jennifer. I would chant my Buddhist chant softly in my room, but there must have been an underlying sadness there, because I felt trapped. I felt trapped in my little, dark room, both physically and emotionally. I still don't really know exactly why I felt this way. Everyone thinks that if you go to school in Santa Cruz, then you can't help but have fun. With the beautiful ocean so close, all I had to do was take off for a day, and listen to the soothing, rhythmic sound of the waves crashing on the shore. Unfortunately, I rarely took advantage of Santa Cruz's natural, scenic beauty. I spent most of my time in class and studying.

One morning I felt so trapped that I decided to pack up my big hiking backpack, and take off without telling anyone. I got in my car and drove through Nevada and Utah all the way to Wyoming. I don't remember much about the drive there except that I slept in my car one night at a rest stop in Nevada. I also brought a book on Buddhism with me titled *Unlocking the Mysteries of Birth and Death*. I read bits and pieces of the book on the way there. It covers a few Buddhist concepts in quite a bit of detail, and I was especially interested in reading the parts about life and death. I wanted to know what Buddhism said about suicide, but all I remember is the description about how when we die our life merges back into the great ocean of the universe. Our individual lives are each like a wave cresting on the ocean's surface, only to crash back into the water again and become one with sea when we die. I liked thinking of life and death like this. I still do. It is a very peaceful perspective.

I knew the route through Nevada and Utah because we used to take family vacations to my grandparents' house in Thermopolis, Wyoming every other summer. It's pretty much Interstate 80 the whole way. I didn't end up in Thermopolis though. I drove to Jackson Hole instead, but I don't remember why. I bought a blue polarfleece in a local shop, and then ended up spending the night outside of town in the woods on the side of the highway. It wasn't too cold, but I crawled into my purple sleeping bag that I had taken with me on a backpacking trip that previous summer. I wondered if there were bears. I brought some Benedryl with me and I took a bunch of the pink pills. Later I threw up and fell asleep. I remember thinking about one of my Buddhist leaders that I was friends with, and the thought of her cheered me up a little. When I woke up, it was daylight. I remembered my Buddhist friend, and decided to pack up and drive home. I even called her when I was almost there. She sounded upbeat, and I was glad I had called her.

I talked to my mom and dad when I came back. Of course they were very worried and concerned. I reassured them that I was ok, and eventually went back to UC Santa Cruz. I hadn't been gone for that long, and I hadn't missed much during my absence. My roommates wondered what had happened, but they weren't overly worried. I talked to another Buddhist friend who was also very concerned, but I never ended up sharing much information