

**MALICE
INTENT**

A Memoir

ALBA CASTILLO

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Library of Congress Control Number: TX 8-259-976

ISBN: 978-0-692-14762-7

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Names, dates, locations, occupations and other distinguishing details have been changed to protect the identity of the people in this book.

This book was printed in the United States of America.

www.maliceintent.com

DEDICATION

To my family and children, whose never-ending love, understanding, and support bring comfort to my life.

Always to God, who listens to my prayers, never fails or abandons me, and remains by my side as I continue on my life's journey.

*Happiness cannot be traveled to,
owned, earned, worn, or consumed.*

*Happiness is the spiritual experience of living
every minute with love, grace and gratitude.*

~ Denis Waitley

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FOREWORD

My name is Alba Castillo, and I am a survivor. I have survived domestic violence, four separate bouts of cancer, and the loss of my youngest daughter to her abusive and controlling father.

I was diagnosed with breast cancer when I was forty-eight. Despite enduring a double mastectomy, a serious infection in the surgery site, and what seemed like endless chemotherapy treatments, the cancer later metastasized to my bones. I have since undergone years of difficult cancer treatments and expect to do so for the rest of my life. But I am more alive and happier now than I have been for most of my life. I am not afraid to die—I do not fear death. I will face it as I have every other obstacle, challenge, and lesson in my life—with my head held high and with dignity.

The traumas I have faced in my life included alcoholism, drug addiction, rape, spousal abuse, betrayal, mental illness, and cancer, and I have grappled with my own self-destructive tendencies. I lost track of who I was and my life purpose. I've learned that my mind is more powerful than my body, and it is my greatest tool to fight and overcome life's adversities, struggles, and fears. I believe others can do that as well. We alone have the ability within ourselves to take control of our lives.

I am human and far from perfect. I have made many mistakes during my life, mistakes that affected many people I love. I suffered the consequences and paid high prices for them all. Events in my life took me to places within myself I had no

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idea existed: deep, dark places residing in my very soul.

I decided to do as my daughter suggested and commit my innermost thoughts, fears, and life experiences to paper. My story is living testimony that we truly can survive more than we ever anticipated. I wrote this book to inspire those who feel there is no way out and no light at the end of the tunnel. We all have choices. But depression has hidden tricksters that sound ominous and, in a negative inner voice not unlike Darth Vader, can send a really scary message: “You can’t change anything. You have no power. It will always be like this. Give in to the dark side.” I have learned NONE of that is true, and I hope that my lessons learned and the wisdom I have gained will inspire others.

This is my story.

THE BEGINNING

I was born and raised in Santa Ynez, a little village on the outskirts of Madrid.

Life in Santa Ynez goes back for many generations. My parents were born and raised there, as were their parents and grandparents. My parents met when they were very young. They fell in love, got married, and remained married for sixty-eight years—for better or for worse.

There used to be 700 to 800 people living in Santa Ynez at any given time. This number decreased as the years went by because people began migrating to Madrid. Now, Santa Ynez has roughly 500 people, mostly widows and the elderly. Everyone there knows each other, which means everyone knows everyone else's business.

The village is so small that there is no need to drive anywhere. Walking across the village takes ten minutes, at most. The houses are made out of stone with thick walls. They are all adjacent to one another, forming one long block. It was safe living there while I was growing up. We did not have to lock the doors to cars or houses, and there was no real danger. There was only one bar in the village square, but other than that, there were no other places to go and not much else of anything to do. My friends and I would go walking two or three miles up and down the few roads, sometimes hiking mountain roads. Other times we would play kids' street sports outside or stay inside our houses playing and listening to music.

I had a simple life. I went to school and helped my mother with the chores. I was always busy learning something new:

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cooking, knitting, embroidering, sewing, and, of course, cleaning. My mother allowed me to play with my friends, but she also felt that I needed to learn how to become a woman at a young age so I would be able to do everything a wife and a mother could once I got married.

Unlike my brother and sister, I was a rebel. My family is made up of conservative Catholics. I was taught to believe in God, to go to church every Sunday, and to be the best I could be by adhering to morals, values, integrity, and understanding the difference between good and bad, right and wrong. I was shown love and affection, and as a result, I have always been very comfortable with my feelings and emotions.

Back when I was a young girl, finding a boyfriend, getting married, and starting a family with a man from the same village, or at least one nearby, was expected. I, however, always felt like an outsider. I did not belong in Santa Ynez. I always knew that getting married and living there for the rest of my life was not in my future. I am a free-spirited individual, and living in such a little village made me feel like a caged bird unable to fly away.

I did enjoy going to school and learning. I applied myself and earned good grades. My teachers felt that seventh grade was far too easy for me, so they decided to bump me up to the eighth grade. Therefore, I finished middle school at the age of thirteen.

Our village's school ended at middle school. In order to continue my studies, I would have had to relocate to Banderas, the nearest town, which was an hour away. My teachers told my mother that I had great potential and should continue my studies. Going to high school was a vital step in the right

direction.

My mother, despite the empty-nest pain in her heart given my young age, agreed that I could go and began making the arrangements. As the time grew closer for me to be on my way to high school, however, she became increasingly upset. She cried alone to shield us from the pain she was feeling for having to let me go.

I saw and felt her pain. She looked as if she had aged ten years in three days. Seeing the sadness she had so much trouble concealing, and having watched her suffer all my life, I did not want her to suffer more on my account.

So I proposed the following compromise: “Mama, I will make you a deal. If you buy me a motorcycle, I will stay instead of going to high school.” She agreed, and soon enough, I had my motorcycle and remained living in Santa Ynez as I had bargained.

I began working at the age of fourteen. I worked five days a week, eight hours a day, and continued working until I reached the age of eighteen. When I was sixteen, I began attending night school in a nearby village. I attended my classes every evening, except I didn’t apply myself and did not do much studying. After a while, I started skipping classes to go dancing at a nearby club instead. The only class I made sure to always attend was English.

My childhood was not perfect, but it was nice. (I don’t believe there is such a thing as perfection. We are only human, and therefore, far from perfect.) My mother is an amazing woman and mother. Everything that I am, everything I have endured, and everything that I have survived in life, I owe to her. I am who I am because of her.

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When I was growing up, she constantly gave me advice. Each time she would start, I would think to myself, “Here she goes again!” At the time I thought her words were going in one ear and out the other, but later in life I learned that I had actually heard her.

It was not until years later that I realized the impact her words really had on me. They ended up being the foundation on which I stood, keeping me whole, intact, and ultimately stronger at times when it would have been so easy to give up.

I have survived. I am alive today, and I owe it all to my mother. She is my angel. The advice she gave me continued to play over and over in my head throughout the years, especially when I felt lost and broken and found myself in what appeared to be the end of a long, dark road with no way out. I heard her speaking to me with love, understanding, and with my best interests at heart. I felt her presence and endless love for me. I found the courage to choose right from wrong and good from bad, keep my integrity and faith intact, remember my roots, and believe, in spite of how badly I may have been treated by others, that what you give you get back. And so I chose to walk away rather than to engage in revenge.

Our family was no different than any other typical family with its positive aspects and failings.

My father was a farmer who worked the land he inherited that had been passed on from generation to generation. His mother died when he was two years old and his father raised him.

My father fulfilled his role as a provider and had a good heart overall, but he had a bad temper, and the way he treated

my mother was cruel. During my childhood, my father criticized my mother as far back as I can remember.

Granted, he left to work the land many times before daylight and came back at night, but exhaustion should not have been a cause or excuse for him to shout at or insult my mother just because she had not set out his socks along with the rest of his clothes after he took a shower or because there was a fork, spoon, or glass missing when it was time for him to sit down at the table.

She was his servant, and watching her cry was very painful for me.

My father never had much to say to his children—my brother, sister, or me—and I don't recall him showing us any real affection. I was never close to him.

My mother, on the other hand, was completely the opposite. She always gave of herself, always protected and took care of us, and never asked for anything in return. We were, and continue to be, her world. She constantly worked hard to keep us all happy and well cared for, asking for nothing in return except for us to be the best we could be every single day.

Every time we did something wrong, she protected us by hiding our wrongdoing from our father so he wouldn't get mad and yell at us. His anger was something all of us wanted to avoid!

Sometimes, my father's yelling and constant complaining to my mom made it very difficult to stay in the house. I would then go to the house where my mother had grown up and stay there for a few hours. Her sister had inherited it when my grandparents passed away, and it remained empty because my

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aunt and her family lived in the city.

My aunt's house was big, built of stone, and had very thick walls. There was no need for air conditioning in the summer, and in the winter it was very cold inside. I would take the spare set of keys my mother kept, go there by myself, and wait for a few hours before going back home in hopes that things had quieted down.

Other times I would go to church to pray. The church was beautiful. It was built in the fourteenth century and was quite exceptional. I found comfort just sitting there, praying to God for my mother's suffering to stop. The church still holds a very special place in my heart.

I asked my mother to leave my father, but she replied, "Where am I going to go? I got married for better or for worse." She stayed by his side and silently suffered to the very end of his life.

My brother and sister were very much alike in that they did what was expected of them. They met their respective girlfriend and boyfriend, became engaged, bought a house, got married, and had children. I did the complete opposite. In fact, I went in reverse! And just when everyone thought there wouldn't be any more surprises from me, there were!

The pity of it all was that most of the surprises were not good. I was a rebel at heart going back as far as I can remember: If everyone went to the right, I refused to follow and off I went in the opposite direction.

Each time I did not follow the rules as expected, which was rather frequently, my mother would ask me, "What are the people in the village going to think about you?"

My response? “Do any of them sleep in this house? Do they pay our bills? Are they—in any way, shape, or form—a part of our lives? The answer is ‘no,’ so who cares what they say or what they think?”

One way in which I consistently stepped out of the boundaries my mother had set for me was to stay out late.

I’ve always loved music and enjoyed dancing. Beginning at the age of fourteen, I would go dancing on the weekends with my friends in surrounding villages, but I always came home two or three hours past my given curfew. My mother would stay up waiting for me into the early morning hours. I dreaded opening the front door knowing what I had coming, since it was never good. However, I continued to break the rules anyway.

Santa Ynez, like every other village in Spain, held what we called “fiestas” once a year, which included the running of bulls in the streets. These parties lasted for seven days. I really enjoyed the fiestas. I still do, and I go home for them as often as I can.

On the first day of the fiesta we had what we called “Toro de Polvora.” It involved a man-made bull, which one of the village men carried, and had fireworks shooting up everywhere as he chased people around the village square.

On the second day we went to church in the morning, and in the evening several musical groups set up on a platform to perform in the square while everyone danced—children, teenagers, married couples, and even the elderly.

But the day I liked the most was the evening prior to the

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villagers bringing in the bulls. My friends and I would stay awake all night waiting for the bulls to be brought in, which happened in the very early hours of the morning.

Handlers brought the bulls and cows in together, and shortly thereafter, they would let a cow into the ring for the people in the village to come out and run with it—or better yet, run away from it! A few hours later, we watched the bulls running in the streets. On only one day, a bull would be let out in the field.

Letting a bull out in the field was dangerous because sometimes the bull would head toward the village instead of the open field. On one occasion, my mother opened our front door, and right there in front of her very eyes was a bull staring directly at her. Needless to say, she shut the door immediately, her heart about to jump right out of her chest.

Otherwise, if all went well and the bull remained in the field, people from our village and other villages nearby would come to join in the festivities. They came on motorcycles, scooters, horses, trucks, cars, vans, and tractors. Many people even came on foot. They would line up, circling around the truck, waiting for the sliding door to go up and for the bull to come down the ramp, running furiously toward them. Then they would follow the bull up and down the mountains, sometimes having very close encounters with it.

Many times these encounters were a bit too close for comfort. I am not a bull expert by any means, but I've always heard that once a bull is out and around people, it learns too much and can't be returned to the livestock farm.

The village men placed iron bars along the streets, which allowed us to be in close proximity with the bull while still

being as safe as possible. We had to be very careful because sometimes the bulls hit the iron bars, trying to get to the people standing behind them. In doing so, they occasionally managed to stick a horn between the bars. Once one horn was in, chances were the other one would go in also, and once the head of a bull was in, the body would follow.

I did not enjoy the bullfights and the pain and suffering the bulls were doomed to endure from the beginning until their death.

Young boys aspiring to become bullfighters would be hired as matadors to visit the villages. Given that they were learning, it would take them many attempts to kill a bull. It was very hard for me to watch because I love bulls. They are brave, strong, and beautiful.

I often climbed up the small building where the bulls were kept and remained frozen there, looking at them through the bars, straight into their eyes with an immense feeling of respect, admiration, and fear.

Having grown up watching bullfights, I have witnessed that no matter what is done to a bull, or how much physical pain it is subjected to, the bull will remain standing and only collapse when taking its last breath. In many ways, I have compared my life to the life of a bull.

Each time I go home, my sister takes me to see them in the livestock farms. I stand behind the fence just looking at them, admiring them, fearing them, and enjoying the moment as my sister patiently waits for me. From the other side of the fence, they stare right back at me, letting me know that as long as I mind my business and do not invade their space, they will do the same.

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During these visits, I cherish the time I spend with my family, and given that I am not able to visit frequently, whenever I am with them I make it a point to make every moment count, not wasting even one.

One day when I was thirteen years old, my mother was in the kitchen washing dishes. I said to her, “Mama, I am not going to have a boyfriend or get married in Santa Ynez. When I turn eighteen, I will go to England and learn English.”

She replied, “You’re talking crazy, Alba. Who knows what can happen between now and then? The next thing you are going to tell me is that you want a horse. Stop talking nonsense and go upstairs and clean your room!”

When I was fifteen, I expressed my intentions to my supervisor at work. He stated, “You will do just like every other girl in the village does. You will get married, have children, and live here happily ever after.”

I quit my job two weeks before my eighteenth birthday and left the village three days later. A few days before my departure, my supervisor approached me and said, “I have to apologize for not giving you the credit that you deserved when you told me you wouldn’t stay in the village. I did not believe you then, but you have proven me wrong. I wish you all the best that life has to offer you.” He has since passed away; may he rest in peace.

My father was diagnosed with dementia by the end of 2012. A year later, I went home to visit my family. My father still remembered me, although his mind was often absent, present in another world—his new world.

For the first time in my life he was affectionate with me. I

had the opportunity to kiss and hug him. He told me frequently that he loved me, and in return I told him that I also loved him very much. I was happy to observe how much he had changed and how kind and loving he was to my mother in his final days.

It is the last memory I have of him and one that keeps playing on and on in my mind. I would never see him again. He passed away in 2014, dying peacefully in his sleep one night with my mother, his partner of sixty-eight years, by his side, surrounded by her never-ending, comforting love.

That night she said good night to him one more time, for the last time. And I am blessed to know that my last memory of him is hearing him say to me, "I love you."

DEFIANCE

The first adventure in my journey began when I left Santa Ynez to live in Madrid with my mother's sister.

My intentions were to go to England to learn English, just as I had planned while growing up. Given that I didn't have any money, I worked in a factory making handbags while I attended evening English classes.

Three months later, a friend I knew from one of the nearby villages told me that he was driving to England, and he invited me to go with him. I did not tell my mother that I was going, but I did tell my aunt and asked her to keep my secret.

Once in London, I called my mother. When I told her where I was, she said, "I am glad to know that you are safe, but had you asked me if you could go, I would have said no."

"And that is why I did not ask you, Mother," I thought to myself.

I stayed in England for a few days while I looked for a job. When I found one, I flew back home to gather my things and say good-bye to my family.

Spain was not a part of the common market, so the only way I could work in England was as an au pair. According to the agency and my own understanding, I was going back to England to live with a family and take care of their children during the day. I would attend school in the evenings.

I was picked up at the airport by a man from the agency and driven to the home where I was to work. Much to my surprise, there were adults but no children in the house. The three months of English classes I had taken in Madrid had not done much for me as I was unable to understand a word the

driver or the family were saying.

The next morning I called the agency to inquire about my new situation. I was advised that I would be working as a maid in the house.

My room was very small, only slightly larger than a closet—a small closet. The only time the family addressed me was to give me orders. I woke up early each morning to make breakfast for them and set the table. I was never asked to join them for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. I was expected to eat by myself, and the majority of my days were spent cleaning the house.

A week after I took this position, I called a Spanish girl who was the same age as I was. I had met her while looking for a job on my first trip to England. She was living with her mother, a single parent, who was also from Spain. They picked me up, and I stayed at their house while I searched for another position. I simply could not take working as a maid in that house any longer.

I called the agency again. They were able to find a job for me working at a fast-food restaurant. Given that the only job I could legally have in England was as an au pair, working this new job was illegal.

I would again be working six days a week, twelve hours a day, for low wages. In exchange, I was given a small room.

I remember one time I was very sick with a high fever. I fell into a deep sleep, and when I woke up, four days had gone by. I called my mother, crying.

“We will send you the money to fly back home,” she said. “Just come back.”

To this I replied, “I cannot come back until I learn English

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better.”

The restaurant was a long, rectangular structure. My room was adjacent to it. In the back, there was a small trailer where the landlord would stay when he came to visit from time to time. Surrounding the trailer and behind the restaurant, there was a closed-in fence where the owner kept a large dog for security purposes.

One day when I opened the back door, the dog attacked me, sinking its teeth into my arm. It only let go when I started screaming. The owner came running out and pulled the dog off me. I was taken to the hospital and given a tetanus shot.

I was working very hard, and many hours, but I knew that it was as good as it was going to get for me. I did not speak English well yet, and until I learned to how to communicate coherently with the customers, my job was to clear tables, do dishes, and clean the restaurant overall.

I began going to night school again, taking English classes, and waited for the bus in very cold temperatures each day for approximately two weeks. Finally I decided that I would learn the language on my own, and I did. Six months into my stay in England, I understood enough English to graduate into working as a cashier.

The restaurant where I was working was located between two small towns, approximately two miles from each. I was very naïve and inexperienced, and on one of my days off from work, I was in the restaurant talking to one of the customers. I told him that I was on my way to the next town to catch the train. He offered to give me a ride, and I accepted.

On the way to town, he deviated from the road and drove to a deserted beach with the intention to rape me. I don't know

how I realized what he intended to do, but I broke loose. I took off running as fast as I could and never looked back. I would never again get into a car with a stranger.

One day the owner of the restaurant announced that he was opening another restaurant. I was transferred to work there. Ironically, the managers of this restaurant, a married couple, were originally from Spain. They treated me terribly. I continued to work six days a week, twelve hours a day, and they treated me like a slave.

During my time at this restaurant, I met a young man I really liked. He was an English boy and a cook. I ended up staying with him while I considered what to do next. I left work and disappeared for three days.

I did not call the managers. Given that the agency had sent me to them, it was their responsibility to look after my safety. When I didn't show up for work, they feigned worry that something may have happened to me—not because they cared about me, but because they were afraid of what may happen to them if I didn't turn up.

Three days later, when I returned, I told them, “The rules have changed. I will not be treated as a slave but as a human being. Should this not be the case, I will call the owner and tell him everything that you have done to me. I will explain to him the ways you have treated me. I will also tell him that I do everything around here while you do nothing but order me around.”

They eased up on me a little. I continued to work there a while longer, but I eventually moved on and found a job at an Italian restaurant. I rented a small room nearby.

I only had one day off each week and would usually

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spend it with the English boy. I had my first sexual experience with him, and we would remain together during my stay in England.

I had lived in England for a year and a half when I decided to go back home to visit my family. On my way back, I was stopped at the airport by Immigration and questioned.

After interrogating me for five hours, they decided that I had been working in England illegally. I was told that I was being deported and was given twenty-four hours to collect my belongings and return to Immigration. When I returned for my impending return back home, I was held for a day in a room with many other people from all over the world. That night I was ordered to sleep on a bed as hard as a rock. The bright lights remained on all night long.

I was awakened very early the next morning, searched, and taken to a helicopter to be flown to the airport. Once I was on the plane, I was handed my passport and deported back to Spain.

In Madrid, I went back to the academy where I had previously taken classes before relocating to England. I met with the director who found my skills in English adequate enough to offer me a job teaching English there. A few weeks later, he spoke to me in detail about teaching English to upper-level, secondary school students. Apparently, the then-working teacher was older; the students failed to apply themselves and played around. The teacher could not keep order in the classroom.

A few days before Christmas vacation, I met with the principal of the secondary school. She advised me that she had

heard very good things about me and wanted me to give it a try. She gave me the handbook to look over during Christmas vacation. I was hesitant, realizing that this was a major challenge for me. After all, I wasn't even twenty years old, and these kids were around eighteen. I looked over the book and decided that it was a challenge I was willing to take, and I did.

On the first day following Christmas vacation, I began teaching English grammar. I introduced myself, set the ground rules for the class, told them what type of behavior would or wouldn't be tolerated in the classroom, and what consequences there would be if the rules weren't followed.

Surprisingly enough, the class, consisting of approximately thirty-four students, behaved. With the exception of two students who were occasionally a bit of trouble, everyone followed the rules I had set for them on the first day of class. Outside the classroom, I was one of them and socialized with some. However, in the classroom, I was the teacher. They understood this relationship, abided by my rules, and respected me. As the school year came to an end, I successfully completed the grading period. The director congratulated me for a job well done.

When my work at the school was finished, rather than return to the academy to continue teaching English, I decided to go back to England—merely for the purpose of making a point. I felt absolutely devilish. Although I had been deported and was restricted from entering the country again, I was going to prove that I could go back, work illegally again, and then leave whenever I chose.

I began making the arrangements. I tore my passport to pieces, put it in the trash (it had been stamped to indicate that I

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had been deported), and got a new passport. Given that I had been deported from both airports in London, I knew the best way for me to get back into England was to go by boat. I took a train to northern Spain and from there boarded a boat to Portsmouth.

Upon my arrival in England, I told Immigration what they wanted to hear instead of the truth. If I had told them that my intention was to stay in the country for six months, they would have questioned me endlessly, then probably given me only two weeks. I told them that I was there on vacation for two weeks. They stamped my passport, allowing me to remain in the country for six months.

Once in London, I called my Spanish friend and stayed with her and her mother until I found a job and a place of my own. This time around, I spoke sufficient enough English to find a job at a nice restaurant working as a waitress and earning a decent salary.

Even though my previous employers had taken advantage of me, exploiting me for a year and a half, this time around it would be different.

And once I had proven my point, I'd go back home and never again return to England.