

Adventures in McCloudland

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Chapter 46

2001

Juanita

Mid morning during the construction, a woman came by the hotel to let me know she was interested in a job when we opened Juanita Rushton would become employee, sister, confidant, partner, and best friend...and eight years later...a good friend with a rich history.

From the beginning I liked her. She sat across from my desk and told me she was currently managing Joanie's Bed & Breakfast for an out-of-town owner. She made the reservations, cooked breakfast, cleaned and generally ran the place. She'd lived in McCloud for many years, had grown children and would love to work here. We agreed that we'd keep in touch and, as the opening date approached, we'd get together again.

Actually, after that brief meeting, I had already decided I'd like to have her here as our General Manager. Lee would return to his 4 day work schedule in Oakland after the opening. Juanita and I would make a good team to run the place.

During April, I got in touch with Juanita. We agreed we could do this. Although I couldn't begin paying staff until we were nearly opened, she offered to help hang wallpaper and get things set up. On a freezing Easter weekend, Lee, Juanita and I started hanging wallpaper in Suite 211. It was snowing outside. We strung a long extension cord to a propane heater and pointed it into the suite. I'd take the electric tea kettle downstairs and outside to fill it as there was no running water in the hotel. It was icy water and would take about 20 minutes heat so we could use it for the wallpaper only to have it cool so quickly we were running just to keep a supply for warm water. We worked two full days and would fall into bed exhausted. Juanita would always give 100% and work harder than I did.

More than anything else Juanita provided me with the companionship and partnership I needed so much during the first year of operation. Lee would be here for weekends and return to the Bay Area on Monday to work. Juanita and I would fill our long days with preparing and serving breakfast, cleaning everything in sight, answering the phones and welcoming guests. Juanita would “mind the desk” and I’d get a chance to shower and change before she headed home and I managed the desk and guests during the evening.

Like a couple of soul mates, we’d laugh together and sometimes cry at our exhaustion or misunderstandings. But we hung in there. But relationships are tricky, and things are not always what they seem. Five years later, Juanita left the hotel, and us. We still see her often and count her as a good friend. I’ll never really understand why she left the hotel, except maybe she wanted a life.