



Bonnie and Glenn Warren (photo by Marsha Traeger, 1987)

## Dead of Winter

**L**ike clockwork, I awoke at four in the morning on January 7, 1997 and looked through the sliding glass door in our bedroom. The yardstick Glenn had jabbed into our snow-covered deck was no longer visible—it had snowed hard through the night, and it was still snowing.

Glenn had been routinely shoveling our front deck and the long flight of steps leading to it, but he'd purposely neglected the deck off our bedroom. Now that the yardstick was buried, it was time to relieve the structure of its frosty tonnage. I'd expressed concern about it the day before because rooftops were collapsing in and around north Idaho. Our roof was steep and made of metal, so the snow would systematically slide off from the stress of the load. Our side deck, however, had become dilapidated, undermined by carpenter ants, and with the weather offering no sign of reprieve its awaiting peril seemed imminent.

I wasn't looking forward to the twenty-five mile drive to Sandpoint. My espresso café, "Jumpin' Joe's," opened at six-thirty, and I suspected the highway department hadn't plowed the roads. It had been an extremely harsh winter, and the overnight snowfall had added another foot to the existing four to five feet that already blanketed the county.

I glanced at Glenn, sleeping soundly, and I grudgingly rolled out of bed and plodded off to the shower. I probably should have gone outside and tackled the snow engulfing my Subaru, first, but the thought of venturing into the cold was far from appealing. I hoped Glenn wouldn't mind doing it for me.

I lingered under the showerhead, soaking in the warmth, thinking about the day's agenda, never dreaming that Tuesday would forever change my tomorrows.

As I'd suspected, the highway department hadn't made an appearance. The roadway was laden with a good ten to twelve inches of heavy snow. I could only drive about 35 MPH. I was late to work—no one knew but me.

Business got off to a slow start. School buses weren't running in Bonner County, much to the jubilation of the adolescents. Sympathy seekers drifted in and out through the morning, sipping coffee and complaining about the predicaments created by the weather. I listened and pretended to care when I couldn't care less. I had my own problems to deal with—one being a major move from our rental in Hope to another rental in Sandpoint, in the dead of winter.

My mother had become my silent business partner and had recently visited during the holidays. During her stay, she'd decided to move to Sandpoint to be more involved in our café. I was thrilled with her decision. We looked at homes for sale in the area and found a diamond in the rough that Glenn was anxious to remodel. Upon a second walk-through, Mom put fifteen-hundred-dollars down as earnest money on a contingency agreement, and then she flew back to Chicago and put her house on the market. In the meantime, the owners of the property had agreed to rent the home to us until Mom's house sold.

Our new landlords, the Charltons, had relocated to Oklahoma. Glenn and I were to meet with them at Jumpin' Joe's around five o'clock to sign a rental agreement. Not having to drive back and forth from Hope to Sandpoint, twice a day, was going to be a relief, but we weren't looking forward to moving under such severe winter conditions. Glenn was a real pack rat when it came to construction-related odds and ends. He was a remarkably skilled carpenter and artist. After going to college and receiving a degree in Anthropology, he began doing finish work on boats docked in an around Newport Beach, California, where he'd grown up. He later advanced to the level of project manager, working for large commercial companies in San Diego. The thought of moving the contents of his shop was overwhelming, and I was thankful that burden would be his.

I had a substantial wine delivery that Tuesday morning for a wine-tasting group scheduled to arrive at six o'clock. I spent the afternoon pricing inventory and stocking wine in between customers. It was around three o'clock that the Charltons called to say they had jetlag and wanted to reschedule our meeting for the following day. I immediately phoned Glenn to inform him of the change in plans, but I got the answering machine. I figured he was down in his shop, unable to hear the phone. I called back several minutes later but still got the answering machine. I left a message saying he didn't need to drive to Sandpoint, and I'd see him later.

Around half past four, my part-time employee, Grey Stapleton, a tall, handsome kid with dark hair and an inquisitive nature, arrived to do some cleanup. By that time, I was wondering about Glenn and why he hadn't phoned or shown up. I made a few calls to see if any of our friends had heard from him, but no one had.

Grey was in extremely good spirits and attempted to engage me in spiritual conversation. "Hey, Bonnie, what do you think happens to you when you die? I mean where do you think you go?"

I was preoccupied with Glenn's whereabouts and sighed, "I don't know, Grey. I kind of believe in reincarnation. I don't think we can learn everything there is to learn in just one lifetime.

I think this is like school, you know, that maybe we keep coming back until we get it right. But that's probably my way of rationalizing my own fears about death."

Grey was eighteen and going through a metaphysical phase. I remembered experiencing that myself at his age.

"Yeah," he said enthusiastically, "That's what I believe, too. But do you think you come back as a person, or do you think maybe you come back as an animal or an insect or something?"

"I hope I come back as a person, but who knows?"

The wine tasting group was going to be arriving, so I asked Grey to pick up his pace. I went into the bathroom and then heard the phone ringing. I yelled to Grey to answer it, thinking it was Glenn. Bill Nance, my friend in charge of the wine tasting, had called and was going to be late. There'd been a bad crash on highway 200. Traffic was apparently backed up for quite a ways, and police weren't letting anyone through the accident scene.

I thought out loud to Grey, "I bet *that's* why Glenn's late. He must be held up by that accident." I felt somewhat relieved.

The phone rang again several minutes later. I answered. This time it was Bill's wife, Debby. "Bonnie, could you let Bill know I'm going to be late? There's a terrible accident just passed Kootenai. I just now got home."

Both Bill and Debby worked at Bonner General Hospital in Sandpoint, and Debby had gone home to shower and clean up before driving back to Sandpoint for the wine tasting.

"Sure," I said. "Bill just called here a few minutes ago. Guess he was held up on the other side of the accident."

"Well, I didn't see him . . . but there was a lot going on. It was a really bad accident."

I asked, "Did you see Glenn's VW van anywhere in that traffic?"

She responded with a sense of urgency, "What does it look like?"

"It's two-tone blue . . . light blue on top and darker blue below."

She cupped the phone and called to her daughter who'd been with her on her drive home. Debby's voice was somewhat muffled, but I could still hear her. She sounded alarmed, "Lindsey, what color was that van?" Debby's tone became dark, "Oh, Bonnie, a van just like the one you described was *in* the accident!"

My heart was in my throat. "Was it damaged? Did you see Glenn?"

"Yes, it was."

"Did you see Glenn?" I repeated.

"Bonnie, you'd better go to the hospital emergency room right away. I'm sure Glenn's there."

My knees buckled. I dropped the phone and sank to the floor.

Grey rushed over to me.

I felt the hot surge of my emotions flood from my stomach into my chest and suck the wind right out of me. "Glenn's been in an accident!" I gasped. "I've gotta get to the hospital!"

At that moment, a man and woman walked into Jumpin' Joe's—a local doctor and his wife who had come for the wine tasting. I was still crumpled on the floor. Grey explained to them what had happened. The doctor volunteered to drive me to the hospital, just several blocks away.

Once we got to the hospital, the doctor led me through the corridor to the emergency room. I was in a complete daze. There was a lot of commotion going on, and everything seemed so bright, loud, and surreal. The doctor asked if Glenn Warren had been admitted. A nurse informed that Glenn was in critical condition, and they were working on him. I was in shock and could not believe what was happening.