

Judy Strick...Living on the Fault Line...Tales from L.A.



Story № 6

Memoirs of a Seventy-Year Old Stoner

LAUREL CANYON

Aaahhh, my L.A. I knew you when we were both a lot younger -- sixty-four years younger in fact, me being eight when my family moved here from Colorado. And you were in your post war real estate boom; you and I, we were both on the verge of a growth spurt.

Those growth spurts, they're hard on everyone. You were a nice city then. I was a nice kid. I fell in love with your palm trees and orange blossoms, and convertible cars and endless blue skies and movie stars...

I worshipped movie stars but everybody stopped loving movie stars and started loving rock stars...

speaking of...

Laurel canyon. I'd moved into my little house on Mesa Path, a winding narrow street off Lookout Mountain Avenue, when Laurel Canyon was the coolest place in the world to be living: that would be in the early Seventies, when rock stars frolicked through the canyons in fringes and beads... Hmm, 1970 and I was in my thirties; and now I'm in my seventies, early seventies mind you, and it's a whole other century now...

ah, yes... and here I am still in the Mesa Path house...

not that I'm complaining, mind you. I love my house. I love the redwood tree in my back yard, and the Seven Dwarfs style architecture. I love my dog. I love my friends...

some of them...

I love Leonard Cohen... I wonder if he ever lived in the canyon I wonder if he ever hung out at the Canyon Store... Leonard Cohen is the longest I've ever loved a man. That's the trick; never meet 'em....

you might be wondering how I came to be living here in Laurel Canyon, which was never exactly a low rent zone, especially after the rock stars moved in...

on the other hand you might not give a dam

whatever...

but just in case you're curious, this is the back-story. I inherited my house from my uncle Aaron, the "child molester," whom I barely knew I wonder if the canyon was a cool place when my uncle lived here...

I think it probably always was cool; probably even when the Tongva Indians were living on this very ground. When I moved in Joni Mitchell was a neighbor, and Jim Morrison lived a few blocks away. Frank Zappa lived in the big old log cabin enclave at the foot of the hill... There were others -- I can't remember who now

maybe Linda Ronstadt?... no, she didn't live here, she was having an affair with Jerry Brown then; he was the one who lived in the canyon...

was he Governor then?

So that was... oh let me see forty years ago; hmmmph, tempus sure fugits and now he's Governor again. Another triumph of that wise old adage, "what goes around, comes around"... hmmm...

Jerry Brown left Laurel Canyon decades ago -- not cool enough perhaps? Now the coolest place in the world to be is in line in front of any Apple store when they're about to release a new cell phone...

speaking of being in line, did I tell you that yesterday when I was in the bank, one of the customer reps came over while I was waiting to make a

deposit, so I politely made small talk and politely declined her offer to open up a new line of credit, telling her, "Oh, I'm a lousy credit risk," which wasn't true, but I figured it would stop the sales pitch. Instead, she smiled at me, and said, with the kind of smile you reserve for small helpless creatures, "OH YOU'RE SO CUTE." She said it loudly enough to be heard out in the parking lot. I wanted to punch her in the face and shout, "I'M NOT CUTE. PUPPIES ARE CUTE, BABIES ARE CUTE! I'M TOUGH AND I'VE LIVED FOR A LONG TIME AND I'VE FORGOTTEN A THOUSAND THINGS MORE THAN YOU KNOW, SO FUCK YOU!" But instead I smiled wanly and shrugged...

do you know that they used to call Jerry Brown "Governor Moonbeam" the first time he was governor. I always thought that was uncalled for...

oh yes, where was I? Lines... cell phones. I have a new cell phone. It does everything but walk the dog, and wouldn't that be quite the coup -- a cell phone that could clean up dog crap, emit a laser that would zap the turd to dust. There's an idea for you Steve Jobs -- oh no, he's dead, my stupid... who's the new genius Thomas Edison? No, dead too...

enough about geniuses, let's talk about me, since I hopefully have your undivided attention. You see, I've always been good with ideas -- a virtual fount of misplaced creativity. I played the violin quite well, I painted quite well, I wrote poetry quite well; You will notice that nowhere in there is the word "brilliant." I can just imagine my obituary page, "*Camille Bauer, a woman of*

many talents, few achievements. She is survived by her dog, Terence. She has no other survivors. Nobody gives a shit that she's dead... "

as I was saying...

ummmmm. Where was I?...

did you know that when rat colonies are overcrowded, the incidence of homosexuality rises; very Darwinian, don't you think. Speaking of Darwin, have you ever wondered why so many people keep moving to California -- especially to the west coast, where you're almost guaranteed to have to live through a major earthquake... perhaps it's population control... like lemmings jumping off a cliff...

earthquakes... Yecccch!...

this house has seen a lot of earthquakes, and it's still standing. I hope they can say that for me; not seeing a lot of earthquakes, but still standing. I moved into this house a year after the Sylmar earthquake. I was still married in 1971; we had been married for ten years... time seemed to go by so slowly then. Ten years was a lifetime, now it's a blink of the eye...

have you ever noticed in an earthquake or car crash how time slows down? So what the hell is time except a perception wrought by the human brain...

anyway, Ben, that's his name, the ex; Ben and I never got around to having kids. We had dogs instead. The dogs warned us about the earthquake. They started pacing and barking right before it happened. They didn't warn us about the divorce well that's a whole other lifetime isn't it...

I still have a dog -- did I mention him -- Terence; I didn't have him during the '94 earthquake. I had a boyfriend for that one. I would have been better off with a dog. Terence is part golden retriever; he's blond; he reminded me of Terence Stamp in Billy Budd. I had a crush on Terence Stamp the whole time I was married to Ben. Good thing Terence Stamp lived in England -- like I would've had a chance with Terence Stamp...

I once dated a very important older man for a year -- he was fifteen years older than me. He dumped me for his secretary who was ten years younger than I

They're still together; what works, works... He just had his ninetieth birthday party. It was in the Sunday paper. He's had face work; he's still an important man.

But my god, ninety...

Another lifetime...

speaking of other lifetimes, did I tell you about my grandparents, who were from the old country, in Italy? They were born before there were cars or

telephones, much less computers. Anyway, when I was a kid, they had moved to California and bought a big green Ford. They used to call the car "The Machine" as in, "let's take the machine and go for a ride in the country..." I guess that's why the computer is not my friend -- to me it's the machine...

So... machines...

my uncle used to sell washing machines. You're probably curious about my uncle, the one who left me the house, the child molester. He married a thirteen-year old girl, and got her pregnant by the time she was fourteen. They were from Louisiana where such things were not considered criminal offenses. But in my family my father always called his brother-in-law "the child- molester," which pissed my mother off considerably, because he was her kid brother. The baby died before it was born, and the child bride took off, and my uncle never again trusted women. He became a recluse living in the canyon... and the rest of us didn't even know he was in L.A.

...and that's how I came to inherit the house -- which is how I came to have the affair with the drummer from The Mothers of Invention, who lived right around the corner... but that's a whole other story. Let's just say he was a drummer who knew his hot licks; there, now I've grossed you out. Women in their seventies are not supposed to be vulgar -- especially if we're "cute." I've been so over sex anyway; for years -- thank god... but in the 1970s I was like a frat boy putting notches on my belt... oh, that was not fun, even though it took me a while to figure out that I was fairly miserable. But it was the Seventies, caught up in the zeitgeist, what are you gonna do... ? I was not

boy crazy at the appropriate time in life. When I was sweet sixteen I had never been kissed. I was too shy to speak, much less to kiss. I was a virgin when I got married... and I loved Ben, but it was not a sexual thing... nothing's perfect.

...so if you happen to hit adolescence when you're thirty -- it's a wild ride; and speaking of sixteen and wild rides...

Disneyland -- my birthday, did I tell you about my sixteenth birthday, which took place in June of 1956; a year after the park had been opened, and people were still dazzled by the splendor of "The Magical Kingdom." My mother let me invite two friends, who were considerably more adorable than I. And this is what I remember about that whole day... a boy flirted with me. One of the teenage jocks who was operating one of the rides... I can't remember which -- maybe the spinning teacups... he flirted with *me* -- not one of my cute curvaceous girlfriends who were always being flirted with, but me, shy me who only started needing a bra last year. Me, who had been invisible until that magical moment in the Magical Kingdom. So that was my first flirtation, when I turned sixteen and became desirable... on some dumb ride in Disneyland...

I've always been a late bloomer; what a nightmare that was: waiting for my boobs to show up, waiting for my period to arrive, fearing I was some kind of freak, while all around me, other fourteen-year olds were blooming. I wouldn't be a teenager again, if it would bring about world peace. I wouldn't go back to any of it. Childhood is vastly over-rated, at least in my book; The

first ten years were bearable, the next ten were an ordeal; my twenties were okay, I was married with dogs... my thirties were hard -- especially in the Seventies, which were Darwinianly hard on divorced women who were not in their twenties...

oh well, the story of my life: wrong place, wrong time, wrong number

...the goddamn power of numbers in our lives is why I stopped weighing myself ten years ago. I got sick of stepping on that goddamn scale every morning and having my mood for the day ruled by whatever number popped up. I know, I'm walking a tightrope. I know I risk waking up one morning and finding myself weighing three-hundred pounds, like Kafka's cockroach... so far so good though. My underpants aren't tight...

Yet

"... Regrets, I've had a few, but then again too few to mention..."

...I always liked the way Elvis sang that song. Better than Sinatra -- for me... *"Bit off more than I could chew..."* la,la la... *"without intention..."*

Regrets? What's the point, really in the long run. Do I regret not having kids, not finding my soulmate, not being rich and successful? I don't know; I guess the definition of success is pretty elastic if you want it to be. I like being seventy... because -- why not?! There are so many things you don't have to *BE* anymore... So few permissions you have to ask of anyone other than yourself...

hopefully, one's standards are high.

...oooops; here comes Terence, needing a hug... little sweetie;

I hope we die at the same time. I don't know who will take care of him if I die first.

Nobody wants an old dog.

THE END

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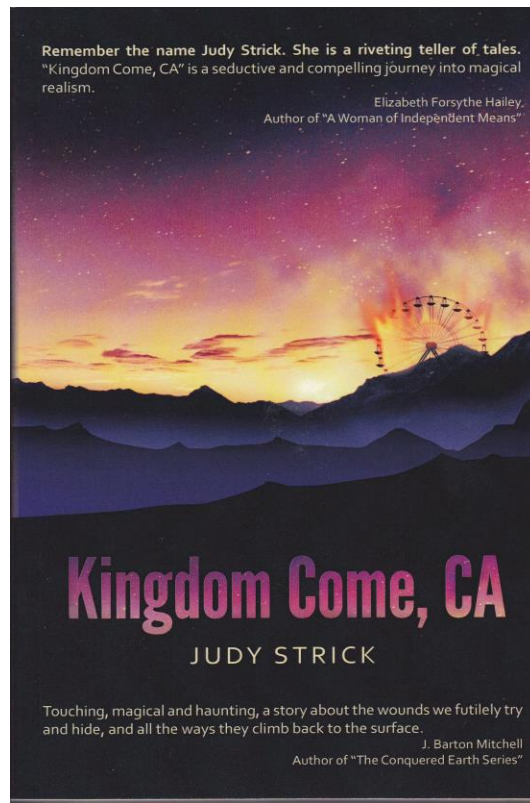
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Judy Strick is a true storyteller. I was immediately taken into a dark, fascinating world of her creation and couldn't follow her fast enough until the last page when I was summarily booted out and left blinking in the sunshine, bereft. I was left with that familiar sweet sorrow on finishing a book I wished I had yet to read.

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