



**THE FINAL  
PAYBACK —  
ERASED AND  
THE MILAM  
CURSE**

**CRAIG R MILAM**

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***“Natura nihil frustra facit.”*** Latin for: Nature does nothing in vain.” It means that – and this is going to sound cliché – Everything happens for a reason. Believe me... it really does!

**I am so grateful for the people in my life, even for those who have caused me so much pain in the past. My life experiences and my family by their actions towards me have taught me that every person has the right to their own lives, to be happy and to be loved in life. \*\*\* I regret being so damn nice, apologizing when I did nothing wrong, taking the blame for things I did not do, tip toeing around family lies, and making my father, my mother, and my brother the most important people in my life when we were a Family. With the passing of time I now can stand back and see the Mysse and Milam Families for what they really were and I can smile. It is a sad fact but true: In the end both families became strangers to each other with the same last names. \*\*\* I will never forget the family memories that created my two books... but I will never miss all the gaslighting which came in the form of outright lying, the manipulation of reality, scapegoating and coercion. I still think about the hollow promises that were made to me in an attempt to steal away my life and my happiness... neither of which was theirs to take.**

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*Our souls are stripped naked in the realization family curses do happen and are real. Some family members are forever in fear of the ghosts of truth that will reveal themselves from the silenced ones... that is why they hide mute and silent in their own darkness of betrayal and greed. I know now that monsters are real and so are ghosts. Both live inside us and only the truth can make them go away.*

*Craig Milam September 21, 2004*

# PROLOGUE

*Written for my nephews Russ and Brad Milam in my hope the “Mysse Curse” nor the “Milam Curse” will ever happen again within their lifetime or within their children’s. I know the truth they live with concerning me, the ranch and our family is one painted by their Mother and Father and perhaps others. I also doubt that either nephew will ever read my version of what really happened. But it is my hope is that the two of you, as brothers, stay family as long as you live understanding that my realities could become your realities. The facts I have written here are only a small collection of my thoughts and words which represented my life, my living in my world, and my dealings with my family during my involvement with the Cherry Creek Sheep Company and with the Milam Basin Creek Ranch. These are the actual events leading to how things came to be as written in my personal journals.*

*The unexpected twists and turns in my life have changed my perspectives about family and life. Unforeseen or catastrophic events rewrite our life stories, and we realize that we don’t know what happens in the next chapter, let alone the conclusion. It’s like being given a new lens with which to view our lives: we learn to accept what we can not change AND to celebrate and be thankful for the good things and those that we love and love us back. Overall, seeing things as they really are... how deep... how wide... how fast the current of life makes us more aware and appreciative of the richness of our lives.*

*Love Uncle Craig*



# Chapter 1

## PARENTAL TRUST



As we grow from childhood to an adult we develop a bond... an unbreakable “TRUST” with our parents. I believe all parents want the very best for their children. At least it starts out that way. They want their young ones to turn out to be that upstanding, knowledgeable adult who contributes to society. More important... I would like to think any parent would want their child to be happy in life.

In my case this parental trust turned into something different. In high school my mother decided that she needed to control all aspects of my life and started to enforce unreasonable expectations upon me and my life. My mother wanted everything to be in its proper place; issuing ultimatums if her instructions were not followed to the letter. Of course assuming all along she knew what

was best for me as an individual or as her son; refusing to even consider any other alternative courses of action other than her own. As a parent my mother, Bernice, was never respectful nor loving nor supportive of my personal thoughts or my actions. Freedom to make individual decisions or to even make my own mistakes in life were not to be tolerated. I once expressed after watching the Wonderful World of Disney how I would love to visit Disneyland or Disney World one day. My mother showing absolutely no empathy loudly retorting, “Why would you want to do that? Disney is for children. If you want to waste your time and money then you can do it on your own someday... if you ever earn enough money that is!”. In my mind all I could say was “WOW!”

After high school I left for college. Yes the college my mother decided I should attend. College meant that each Sunday brought a very long interrogation by my mother of what I had done at school that previous week. The dorm room phone would ring promptly at 5:00 PM. Not a minute



sooner. Not a minute later. Always with the same greeting, "This is your Mother." Those four words became the most dreaded words in the English language for me to hear as long as my mother was alive. My heart would sink with each phone call as it did throughout my life when I would hear those four words echo over the phone. The phone calls were never about catching up or showing any concern about how I was doing in school. Even if there were occasional pangs of concern about my well being from my parents they quickly turned the conversation into some complaint about me or something I had done or did not do...or in an off way how I had mysteriously let them down somehow.

It was only four months into my first year of college and a personal tragedy struck. I was feeling terrible after losing my best friend and college roommate in a mountain climbing incident in Glacier Park, Jimmy Anderson. <https://www.outsideonline.com/adventure-travel/and-none-came-back/> Paul, my father, and Bernice called me to berate me about something inconsequential. Not one word about how I was dealing with my

loss of Jim or if I was okay in everyday life. Then it hit me — every call from my parents left me drained and feeling guilty for not being the “perfect” child. Obviously they wanted a perfect child and they did not get that child in their lives; only me. Neither Paul or Bernice never expressed one bit of grief or advise on coping with Jimmy’s death to help me with my loss. At that moment I was confused to why they were both so matter of fact, so heartless about my friend’s death. I did not realize that I would spend the majority of my life trying to meet their impossible expectations since I wasn’t that perfect child. My parents, Bernice and Paul, were both narcissists and I had absolutely no clue to this fact.

I did not like going to college in Bozeman at Montana State University. I had a variety of reasons none of which had to do with the education I was receiving. I was in the process of transferring from Bozeman to Missoula when my parents asked a special request of myself in the name of “**Family!**” (PLEASE READ JULIUS AND THE MYSSSE CURSE 1971). 1971 was the most revealing

and the most physically and mentally formative and stressful months of my life dealing with my parents (Paul and Bernice) concerning the Cherry Creek Sheep Company. Finding myself being placed in and forever a part of the “Mysse Curse.” After resuming my college education in Missoula and thinking my life was becoming somewhat “normal”; the next wave of toxic family interference and control began. Me not realizing the Mysse Curse over time would slowly evolve and become the Milam Curse. I once again failed to recognize the level of mental and physical abuse that both my parents had been subjecting me to in my life. Both Paul and Bernice were masters at being manipulative. Paul especially was a very good actor outside the family. Paul was charming, friendly and so ultra personable to others in order to manipulate people's positive impressions of his self outside the family home. Behind closed doors both Paul and Bernice were master manipulators and evolving into very efficient dictators.

I did not know how bad my situation really was even though I was smack dab in

the middle of it. Even though I was a victim of a toxic family I did not begin to truly realize that things related to my family were not right until it was way too late in my life. Being as silently toxic as they were; I had been warned and told that by my friend Julius Sebulsky to put as much distance between my parents and myself as I could in 1971. I didn't listen to Julius. Being the good son I dismissed Julius's observations. In short I ignored all the warning signs believing so strongly in the concept of "Family!"... the "Milam Family!"

After a year and a half of separating myself from total parental control hiding myself in college in Missoula Montana I brought someone very special to me home to meet my parents. Someone that I loved and hoped to eventually marry. Of course with the approval of my parents. My father smiled and said this was the one. My mother said very little, but after a private conversation between my girl friend and my mother I was no longer in a relationship with her. I do not know what was said between the two of them, but in the aftermath of everything my mother stated to me that she **"FORBID me from ever**

**marrying anyone!**” “Especially Catholics, Jews, Mexicans, Blacks or people **not** like us, especially those types of people from Butte, Montana.” Wow... If that doesn't instill self doubt into someone trying to establish a relationship with the opposite sex... I don't know what will. Needless to say after that episode I rarely if ever brought a perspective girl friend nor a close friend of either sex home to meet the parents. In truth I did not even want a relationship with someone of the opposite sex, because the poor woman could end up being the wrong religion, not Norwegian enough, heaven forbid Catholic or with too many other variables of acceptance to deal with. When I rarely and reluctantly did bring some one home, it again reaffirmed my mother's ultimate control over me because it would be the last time I would ever see the girl (or guy) ever again. My mother would start by reviewing every small embarrassing episode I had experienced from birth. Acceptance of anyone in my life was not an option, especially with someone of the opposite sex. Mother made sure of that. Why Bernice was that way... I could never understand.

I am one of those people who recognizes slowly what is happening to me. How dysfunctional my life had become all because of my bond with my mother and father in the name of "Family". For years I listened, tried and was totally respectful and considerate to all members of my family. I didn't make this choice overnight... to distance myself from my family. It took many agonizing years... more to the point after my 1971 involvement in the building of a corral wind break and a log lambing shed on the Cherry Creek Sheep Company Ranch. I could see that my father, brother (Gary) and his wife (Réene), and mother were all in their own way involved in a form of manipulation and control as time went on in life. The entire "family" situation had become a toxic cesspool in which all members of my family in the end, as you will see, would gaslight me and try to trash everything I believed in and worked for throughout my life. I thought I could control any and all situations "Family" would or could put me in. I could not! Unfortunately the ultimate outcome was not as I envisioned. But it happened none the less. I was Erased!

As I became more distant from my family, my mother continued to try to control my life by becoming even “more pushy” about who my circle of male or female friends were to be in my life... all the while trying to keep me within her toxic family circle of life. Even though she couldn’t assert her control as she wanted... Bernice wanted to know every detail about my work place, the people I worked with, about who my friends were, everything I did in my life... in short trying to become more controlling by belittling or criticizing the very people I associated with in my everyday life. People whom Bernice knew absolutely nothing about. Bernice would create the ultimate guilt trips... so I would frequently visit my parent’s house in Bigfork to fix or repair something or to be Bernice’s personal chauffeur because Paul was always conveniently unavailable. Bernice never learned how to drive because of Paul’s criticism of her skills as a driver to the detriment of everyone, especially me. Of course my brother Gary couldn’t help in these repairs or emergencies because he had a family he was trying to raise and protect. After all Gary and Réene had lost a son and

Gary needed to be with his family. Mother stated a loss of family like this can not ever happen again to “her” and “her” family. *I guess she wasn't thinking about me when she made that statement.*

My mother, Bernice, was very creative in her own subtle way in setting new standards of control on me... the older I became. The more she would try to control me... the more I found I could not trust her. Eventually Bernice tried instituting a form of “silent judgement” about every aspect of my life. I in turn became more intent on my responsibilities to myself, becoming more aware of my actions in life, and trying to put distance and boundaries between my mother, father, brother and his wife, to protect myself. This was the “quiet” period of my life. Teaching in high schools and coaching as far from Bigfork as I could. Finding even this was not far enough away from the insanity.

After college my first teaching job was in Jordan Montana in 1974. Why? So I could satisfy Bernice's burning obsession to learn every happening or rumor about the Cherry



Creek Sheep Company, about her brother Sivert Mysse and Sivert's wife Janet. I had the opportunity to accept other teaching jobs at a much higher salary, but being the good son once again... in the name of "Family"... I endured being Bernice's spy on the happenings on the Cherry Creek Ranch that she and I were partners-owners in.

News traveled like lightning in Garfield and Rosebud Counties because of Cherry Creek's short wave radios. Other ranches used the same bandwidth as did Cherry Creek. One afternoon in October I was going to check on the log lambing shed that Julius and I had built at Cherry Springs in 1971. I wanted to know how the log building was holding up under the severe weather of eastern Montana for the past three years. Afterwards my goal was to hang out in the Jersey Lilly Bar and Cafe and listen to the local gossip as I ate lunch.

I could see the log lambing shed about a mile away when a Cherry Creek worker approached my pickup on horseback. The rider was someone I had never met. I

introduced myself to him and explained to him my association with Cherry Creek and that I was an owner-partner. The worker's name was Evertt. The first thing Evertt wanted me to know was his name was spelled with two "T's". Then Evertt stated he and the rest of the workers on Cherry Creek were "informed" by Sivert Mysse that if I was ever seen on "his" property to report it to Sivert and Janet immediately. Evertt then politely asked me to get off of Cherry Creek and to never return... adding that in me doing that it would make life better for me and everyone else on Cherry Creek. Interesting statement that I let pass through my mind early that afternoon.

Thanks to the short wave radios on the ranch Sivert was notified that I had been seen at the log shed by Cherry Springs early in the afternoon that day. It was the day after my birthday in October. It would be the last time Sivert and I would speak together for as long as I knew him. Sivert had to drive the 20 plus miles from the home ranch located on the Big Porcupine to Ingomar. I watched him walk into the Jersey Lilly Bar and Cafe as he

searched every table with squinted eyes under his white Stetson cowboy hat. Sivert went to the bar and ordered a bottle Pepsi. After getting his Pepsi he walked over to my table and sat down across from me. Not saying anything... just looking me in the eyes. Sivert in a controlled manner told me to never step foot on his property... ever again! Then Sivert repeated his quiet statement and asked if I had heard him? I nodded my head yes... then Sivert started yelling across the table... spraying Pepsi drops on my food and in my face due to the force of his voice violently expelling from his twitching handlebar mustache..."LISTEN...YOU... you need to understand you are on my land, not Bernice's, not just anyone's property but my damn property! Nothing you see or do will change anything... I am tired of Bernice... her meddling into ranch affairs that are not her concern nor yours... I am tired of Paul thinking he can split up Cherry Creek... tired of everything... do you understand?... I hope you understand every word I say for your own good! If you get hurt on Cherry Creek it is your own fault... you don't belong on my property!!!"

I admit I was taken back by Sivert's shouted statements to me. I asked Sivert, "Is it true you and Janet have put Cherry Creek in debt in the tune of about \$1.5 million dollars? Have you and Janet figured out how you are going to pay the debt off? Maybe no more Fall Parties... maybe no more new suburbans, pickups and farm equipment that you really don't need... Yes I am a partner... and yes my mother is a partner... by the way so is Marie - your sisters are partners in the ranch whether you like it or not ... Merton told me more than I needed to know about you and how you manage the ranch. After being up north with Julius for over six months... I know how you manage things... Sivert interrupts me stating I should have never let you, my sister's son, set foot on my property. Sivert asks, "Are you done?" I simply say no and continue... so where are you going to go when the banks foreclose on Cherry Creek? What happened to all the sheep? What happened to all the partnership payments you promised? We really made a lot of money on the steers the past few years haven't we? NOT! At that point Sivert stood up, staring directly at me in the eyes, stated

to me, “Mark my words... no one but me has ever done any work on Cherry Creek and my father intended me to inherit the entirety ranch. It is the Norwegian way... the eldest inherits everything.” My only response was weak at best but the best I could do at that moment. I said, “REALLY?! Where is that written in stone?”

With a quick walk to his suburban Sivert left Ingomar as quickly as he arrived that afternoon. I did not finish my lunch because I was grossed out by all the Pepsi spray on my food. I couldn't believe Sivert reacted that strongly to me being on Cherry Creek that very afternoon after Evertt and I had our little meeting. Bernice assured me that I could go and look anywhere I wanted on our property.

After Sivert left a friend of mine told me that “word had it” that Sivert had given his workers the permission to remove me by any means they deemed appropriate... even at gun point or with physical force or with the local sheriff. I was more than shocked by my friend's statement and in disbelief, but did not doubt the truth of his statement. John

Pinkerton had never lied to me so why would he lie now! Later that night I made a phone call to Bernice. I explained the happenings as they occurred that day to her. Bernice did not seem surprised and explained to me that her brother had called her earlier and explained to her that I would only be permitted to be on ranch property when she and Paul were there visiting on business. Then my mother completely discounted what happened to me and what Sivert stated about her to me. Bernice stated just do what I tell you to do and do not worry about anything... it was all talk with no substance. I didn't know whether to believe her or not. In time I would definitely find out.

The ranch hands (cowboys) and sheep herders that I knew pretty well only three years earlier when I worked with Julius Sebulsky building a log lambing shed would demand I remove myself off of Sivert's property whenever I was caught in the following months. In February I was on the Garfield county road coming from Cohagen going to Ingomar as I crossed Cherry Creek property. I stopped briefly to relieve myself on

the road along side my pickup. After finishing my momentary break from driving someone on Cherry Creek must have recognized my pickup from a distance. Out of no where a powder metallic light green half ton Chevrolet pickup comes barreling up from the south to block my path as I tried to continue to drive to Ingomar for lunch... I envisioned a bowl of Jersey Lilly beans with a cheese burger and a bag of Cheetos. Both vehicles stop simultaneously with locked brakes due to how fast the metallic light green pickup came upon me. I immediately recognized the person getting out of the pickup as John Sebulsky, Julius Sebulsky's brother. John had a smile on his sun wrinkled face and was cradling a rifle. Without a word spoken and me feeling as if I am seeing an old friend... John Sebulsky actually points his rifle at me and then pulls the trigger. The bullet ricocheted next to me producing a plume of gumbo dust on the winter road. My heart was pumping at heart attack level. John yelled at me to never set foot on Mysse property ever again. Next time I see you I won't be as careful in where I put the next bullet. I exclaimed to John, "I thought we were

friends? What the Hell is wrong with you? John yelled back, “You thought wrong and now you don’t have my fuckn’ brother protecting your worthless ass!” Needless to say... I did as John demanded and headed back to Jordan. John yelled, “Never to set foot on Mysse property again! Got it you piece of shit!”

I called Bernice to explain what had happened that afternoon and told her in my mind it was too dangerous for me to set foot on the ranch. I explained to her that John Sebulsy actually threatened to shoot me on sight and his other statements to me. I did not leave out the fact a bullet hit the ground around three feet from me either. Bernice stated she would call her brother to straighten out this mess. Almost making it sound like I was in the wrong for my actions. Actions she asked me to do. The sad thing was... I wasn’t even interested on anything related to Cherry Creek that day. I was only headed to Ingomar to check on Granddad Mysse’s Old House (as I was asked to do) because of the heavy snow that winter and eat lunch at the Lilly.



A couple of weeks later I called Bernice to learn the outcome of her discussion with Sivert. As my mother stated to me... Sivert simply stated that he had talked to John Sebulsky and John stated that nothing of the sort ever occurred... John stated to Sivert he never saw me on the cut off road. Then Sivert simply stated, "Craig is a liar." After my mother made that statement to me I never really wanted to deal with Sivert, my mother or Cherry Creek ever again. Bernice never told me whether she believed Sivert or me concerning what had happened. My mind was burning up inside of me!

I decided against my mother's wish of me staying in Jordan and not finding another teaching job that spring. In my mind the ranch problems were her's and not mine. After all she wasn't the one that had a rifle pointed at her and she wasn't the one put into a position to experience a near miss with a bullet or her life threatened. I still wonder to this day whether John Sebulsky accidentally discharged his rifle or whether it was deliberately fired with intent. I still see the strange look on his face as he yelled at me

that day. Whether the look on his face was one of total surprise or something else I will never know. I am just glad the bullet damaged the road and not me.

It was late May and I was talking to Donald Bray, the high shop instructor at Jordan High School. We worked at in Jordan at the school together and talked a lot and were pretty good friend. I telling Don about the Jersey Lilly and its food. He had never been there and said it would be his treat if I drove. So the two of us decided to head down to the Jersey Lilly to have lunch. Don had never been to Ingomar and wanted to see a smaller town than Jordan. We were on the Garfield county road crossing Cherry Creek when it happened again. Out of nowhere the metallic light green pickup of John Sebulsky blocks our path and makes us stop in our tracks. Don in an elevated voice says, "Who is that bug eyed lunatic? What the fuck is he going to do with that rifle?" I quickly tell Don to take my .38 Diamondback pistol and to use it if need be. I get out of my pickup and met John at the front of his pickup. John spits his chew out and tells me

to head back to Jordan. I explain to him I was taking a friend to Ingomar to have lunch. John simply states, "Then turn your ass around while things are still good for you and your friend... go by Sand Springs if you want lunch in Ingomar from now on. Cute move on your part bringing someone with you... it doesn't change a fuckn' thing." Then John said something I have read in my journal multiple times. "One bullet or few more won't matter when it happens. There's a lot of places to completely disappear to around here isn't there, Craig! Get my drift?" Don Bray only wanted one thing after overhearing our conversation while he watched John drive away towards Cherry Springs..."Get me the Fuck out of here and take me back to Jordan...NOW!!! Bloody Hell I think I just shit myself! Craig I don't know what you did to piss him off but I definitely wouldn't cross paths with that asshole ever again. I think he wanted to shoot you!" I took Don to the Hell Creek Bar in Jordan and we drank our lunch that day.

Did I mention what happened to Don and I on Cherry Creek to my loving parents?

Hello NO! Bernice seemingly did not believe me after the first time John stopped me. Why would I bring it up again being the liar Sivert portrayed me as being. Even with a credible witness. My remaining weeks in Jordan couldn't go by fast enough. I had had my fill of the know everyone, know everyone's else's business little town of Jordan. I was sick of Garfield and Rosebud counties. I hated everything to do with the Cherry Creek Ranch, I despised Sivert and Janet Mysse, but with two weeks left I got my revenge.

The school year was coming to an end. I went downtown to buy groceries at Ryan's Grocery Store. Parked in front of the Hell Creek Bar was a very familiar pickup. The metallic light green pickup that John Sebulsky drove. Was the pickup owned by John or by Cherry Creek Sheep Company? It didn't matter either way. I waited until dark and peeked into the Hell Creek Bar. There was John, Rummy ( a sheep herder I knew) and someone else I didn't recognize. When the time was right I opened the hood of the pickup and removed the rotor from under the distributor cap. I loosened each distributor

wire from the distributor. Notched each fan belt with my knife so eventually if they did get the pickup started and running at some point in time it would over heat and boil over when the fan belts broke. I unscrewed the Schrader valve from each tire valve stem. Now the pickup would not start. The tires were flat and they had no spare tire. The distributor rotor was in my pocket along with the five Schrader valves I appropriated. I watched the pickup until the Hell Creek Bar closed. Finally a bar tender kicked all the drunk cowboys, shepherders and locals outside on the street to find their way home. I watched the three Cherry Creek clowns each with the glowing ember of a cigarette dangling from their mouths trying to start the pickup. They eventually popped the hood and couldn't find why the pickup wouldn't start. I don't think any of them noticed the flat tires. One of the idiots fell down or passed out on the sidewalk. I went back home.

The next morning the pickup had been towed on its rims to Hagen Ford just east of Main Street. The tires were maybe ruined. My guess is since Hagen Ford worked on Fords

it took them a while to get parts for the Chevrolet distributor. All I knew was the pickup was not permanently damaged and it could be easily repaired. It was more of an inconvenience than real damage to it. And from it all I did feel a certain sense of satisfaction.

Sometime later that summer Sivert called Bernice to see if she knew anything about the incident? Bernice gave me the normal police interrogation but “I knew nothing about it!” and stuck to my story. Inside grinning ear to ear being a little bit proud of myself. Keep in mind John Sebulsky threatened me at gun point with my life not once, but twice. The second time with a witness. The blatant intimidator John and his friends got off easy. If Julius would have been alive he would have taken his brother and staked his naked body on an ant pile and watched it swell up like a balloon... Julius would not have tolerated what happened to me. So maybe Julius did protect me when I worked on the ranch. Besides as I told my mother, “Ranch rules forbid ranch pickups from leaving the ranch without permission

from Sivert or Janet. Why were they in Jordan in the first place? If the pickup needed repairs why would they take it to Hagen Ford in Jordan? All repairs were under normal circumstances to be done at Bogg's Chevrolet in Forsyth. Sivert must have known the pickup was in Jordan if it was taken off the ranch. After all everyone that works on Cherry Creek had a short wave radio so it was really easy to communicate those requests to Sivert and Janet.

After teaching in Jordan I spent the summer in Bigfork working at the Bigfork Summer Playhouse for Don Thompson, at Total Screen Design silk screening T-Shirts for Jack Thompson, mowing lawns all over the town of Bigfork for extra money and trying to forget about the realities of Cherry Creek Sheep Company and Bernice's quest to obtain her heritage. Towards the end of the summer Sivert called Bernice stating he had proof that I had vandalized the Cherry Creek work pickup in Jordan that John Sebulsky drove. Supposedly Sivert had talked to the Jordan Sheriff, named Spud. Spud supposedly had witnesses of me doing the

damage. I knew for a fact that was a lie. Not one soul was on the street where John parked his metallic light green pickup truck. It was nearly pitch black dark and I worked without a flashlight. I walked away from the area of the pickup going away from where I lived and then back tracked back to my rental. Jordan is not that big of a town. No one saw me walking that late at night... that I was aware of. So as my father, Paul, would do I spoke in an elevated voice and stated, "Sivert is a God Damned Liar! If what he is saying is true then press charges and I will turn myself into the authorities in Jordan." Bernice was speechless. I never heard another word about the incident. I know Bernice talked to Sivert in great length over the phone about the whole incident multiple times, but not another word was spoken to me about it. I never did anything like that since that night because of my conscience. I haven't been threatened at gun point, twice, by someone I knew to prompt actions like mine either.

**Interesting Side NOTE:** Towards the end of this same summer my mother did something



which still confuses and pisses me off to this day. Bernice collected magazine covers from the Montana Wool Growers Magazine. Pictures of people who worked on Cherry Creek Sheep Company. Sivert would submit pictures from time to time and those pictures became the cover pictures of the magazine. A small article would be placed in the magazine giving a small bio about the person pictured. Janet Mysse was on one cover for her Janknits Wool business. Carl Watson on another for attending the Nation Sheep Herders Conference in Washington D.C. and receiving a national sheep herder recognition award. Plus others. I believe four magazine covers had been collected by the time she hung the fifth one up down stairs in front of the door leading out of my bedroom in Bigfork. It was a portrait of John Sebulsky in his dark green baseball cap - bug eyed with a shit eating grin on his wrinkled face. I asked Bernice why she would hang him up on the wall of all people? Bernice stated to me, "John Sebulsky is an important part of the history of the Cherry Creek Sheep Company and his participation in keeping your Grandfather's legacy alive is important... he

should be recognized!” I was speechless. I asked her, “Have you forgotten about John putting a bullet into the ground last February? Everett’s, Sivert’s, and John’s threats?” Bernice responds, “It all was a big misunderstanding... get over it.” Bernice was obsessed with keeping her father’s memory alive... I didn’t know what to think... it all did not make sense to me. Even today I can not make sense of what Bernice did. I wish Bernice, Paul and Gary would have been with me from the time Julius and I built the log lambing shed to my time in Jordan being threatened at gunpoint. I forgot they were all narcissists and would not have given a shit whether I died or not. I couldn’t believe Bernice turned everything around concerning the John Sebulsky incident and in a round about way put the blame back on me. Then Bernice got mad at me for getting mad at her about it.

I interviewed at several schools that summer and decided to teach on the Hi-Line next to Havre, Montana at a school called KG. KG stood for Kremlin-Gildford. After coaching football, basketball, track plus my

teaching duties for four years at KG and Stanford I made a decision I had to get completely away from the Cherry Creek Ranch and Bernice. Bernice's requests and nonsense just kept on coming. So I took an overseas contract in Saudi Arabia working for SAS Trading Company who partnered with Dynatera of Dunn, North Carolina.

Finally I thought I had escaped all the craziness of Cherry Creek Ranch and my parents by going off to work in the insane culture of Saudi Arabia for a very long length of time and being self sufficient to only myself. Thinking, as Julius once told me... "Eventually you will end up in Life where you need to be... with who you are meant to be with... and doing what you should be doing in life." I never realized that I would spend half my life before Julius's statement became indeed fact. Mistakes are a fact of life. I thought about all my mistakes when I was working overseas. I damn well didn't want to repeat my mistakes. But as you will see in the name of Family I will repeat my mistakes all over again. How stupid of me!

But NO! Towards the end of my contract Bernice and I talked by satellite about her complete distress and about her breaking down mentally because she dealing with the sale of a part of Cherry Creek Ranch to Kevin Brewer of Forsyth. Marie, her sister, had already made a contract with Kevin and sold her holdings in Cherry Creek Sheep Company. Marie sold everything including her Mineral Rights and Royalties plus property, which property on Cherry Creek was not stated. Talking to Bernice by satellite was not easy because only one person could talk at a time. Bernice would cut into my statements every time I tried to talk. The end result... she wanted me back home because she planned on buying a ranch somewhere in eastern Montana and she wanted both Gary and I to “help her” operate it. She thought she was going to buy Benny Olson’s place because “he was Norwegian and Norwegians stick together and understand each other”. She also stated that any problems I had with my dealings with Cherry Creek Sheep Company and Sivert were totally over. Really? Why did I listen to her?

So I came back to Montana to resume my teaching career while Bernice and Paul looked for a ranch to purchase with the money she got on the sale of her part of Cherry Creek? After the sale Paul told me that part of the deal on the sale was that Bernice bailed Sivert out of every penny he owed on Cherry Creek to all the various banks he was in debt to. Bernice got one million dollars, had Kevin Brewer pay off over \$1.5 million dollars on Sivert's debt so Sivert was free and clear. Paul stated Kevin Brewer could do that because Marie Mysse Straw only got \$240,000 with no mineral rights from Kevin. Paul stated Marie was crazy... she absolutely didn't know the true value of what she owned... all the better for the Milams Paul stated. Maybe Paul was right... I don't know. The crazy thing was that it was the upper pasture of ranch that was sold to Kevin... Sivert kept everything below Brown's Gulch and in my opinion that land was worth way more than the North Pasture of Cherry Creek. What do I know! It has been in my journal since I wrote it there. Unbelievable Bernice would do that for Sivert and why? Oh but there is much more! I hope you keep

reading this... it is just like out of movies.. a horror-mystery film maybe!

No one knows what the future holds for anyone of us. I especially didn't. Like in this book every chapter of my life concerning the Cherry Creek Sheep Company and the Milam Basin Creek Ranch had its twists and turns... thing I never envisioned in my life.

The pattern of one sided accountability by my parents should have been a red flag to me at this early age. I was an adult, but not to my parents. The absence of mutual respect and lack of apologies made me perpetually undervalued and dismissed — me taking the blame for things I did not do in life — a dynamic that only grew more apparent over time. It taught me to value genuine communication and emotional honesty in relationships, something entirely lacking when I grew up. When parents can't see you as an adult and they still see you as a controllable child it shows they have a total lack of respect and care for you as a person. After time it wears on you. Unfortunately for me my love of family would always be

unconditional. My parents love for me was minimal at best with both showing little affection, respect, or loyalty towards me. This family situation was definitely not healthy. But being the devoted son that I always was; I hung in there hoping for a positive change which never came.



# Chapter 2

## MILAM BASIN CREEK RANCH



The most dramatic turn in my life came about when we as a “The Milam Family” went into partnership of a cattle-sheep ranch. My brother, my mother and I became three partners in a “family heritage” cattle-sheep ranch, which we purchased from Merton Mysse. Paul was not to be included in the contract of the partnership because of a “***certain indiscretion***” he had committed with another woman in Bigfork. More important... I had a private verbal agreement with Bernice that Paul would not be an acting (decision making) partner of the ranch... otherwise ***I absolutely did not want to be a part of the ranch partnership...*** thus in my mind Paul would not be able to manipulate ranch matters with his lies as he did in 1971. Looking me directly in the eyes **Bernice promised that Paul would never be “an**



**acting partner or have voice in ranch matters.”** This ranch will be yours and Gary’s ranch to do with as you please... while I am alive and when I am gone.” Deep down in my gut it was hard to believe her after all the past events which happened on the Cherry Creek Sheep Company in 1971. My gut kept telling me over and over not to trust her... after all she was my mother and we were “Family”. In the end I promised Bernice I would do everything in my power to make the ranch a success. Bernice smiled.

I didn’t imagined in my wildest dreams I would be wasting the next 20 years of my life fighting lies and false promises made to me by Bernice, Paul, and Gary. In the end Bernice with the help of Paul and Gary would break her solemn promise she made to me about Milam Basin Creek Ranch. Thus erasing forever and destroying “ALL” Family trust, and forever breaking my heart. I should have never forgiven Bernice and Paul for the bullshit lies concerning my days working on the Cherry Creek Sheep Company in 1971. Stupid me!

After I quit my job in Saudi Arabia and resumed my teaching career I once again found myself bound to a “family contract” working on “our” ranch while teaching in a high school located in the Northwest corner of the state of Montana. After I spent 18 (summers) years of my life performing every duty asked of me ranching; I found my self entangled in the tentacles of control created by both parents and my brother and his wife, something that I had so desperately tried to eliminate from my life. This control of me had taken so many forms I was at my wits end. I so dearly wanted to end the toxic control without causing resentment, loss of family or worse... a fate unknown. Again I found myself in an Alcatraz-like emotional prison on our ranch. I know each of us are responsible for our own actions. So once again I developed a plan to set boundaries and regain control of my life. I wasn't angry, I wasn't obsessed about how my actions would not please family members. My ultimate concern was saving myself, all the while in the back of my mind questioning how truthful my mother was about “**The Promise**”. The Promise was the final and the ultimate

tentacle of her parental control. Bernice had made a promise in 1971 which she kept... so incorrectly I assumed she would keep her word with "The Promise!". Throughout the 18 years "The Promise" would be made whenever I asked for time to myself or when I got discouraged about certain aspects of the ranch because I was the primary worker doing everything that happened physically on the ranch. Mother was not able to work and my father really didn't like hard labor so he avoided any physical labor at all costs. Mother would consistently reaffirm to me that *no matter what happened in life*; upon her passing I would inherit 1/2 of her minerals and 1/2 of her 1/3 of Milam Basin Creek Ranch. My brother, Gary, would inherit exactly the same as me. **"Not a penny difference."** In the final years of her life when she could not spend her summers in Ingomar; she would insist I spend every minute and second of my time including weekends driving from school to work on the ranch. Driving 434 miles from Plains to Ingomar and then another 45 miles of nasty ass roads to Basin Creek. Why? Mother using of course "The Promise" as her point of

leverage. She would tell me how Gary and I would get the ranch and the minerals, while Paul would be taken care of with the money she would set aside from her estate. Mother made this statement not only to me, but to the rest of the family as well. ***Making this statement so many times that my brother asked at one point to buy out “my half of the ranch” when mom passed away.*** Gary and I drank shots sealing the brother-to-brother promise. (Interesting side note: I told Gary I would sell him my half of the ranch eventually, but I would like to work the ranch as brothers and to see if we could finally make a profit on it. Gary agreed with my proposal. I have to believe he used my acceptance of his offer to benefit himself with our mother and then turned this conversation against me. Gary and Reene were as much a players in this toxic mess as my parents were. Mother asked if Gary and I had ever talked about this topic and I said yes. She told me **“the ranch was never to be sold... EVER! A Milam will own it forever!”** A very interesting statement which I never made. Bernice and I never discussed the topic again.

Whenever Milam Basin Creek is finally sold by a Milam to whom ever... I am absolutely sure Bernice will haunt the dreams of the Milams who sold it for all eternity and while she walks the hallowed grounds of the Milam Basin Creek Ranch she will forever be cursing the new owners!

Through the years my father, Paul, would state over and over he had no interest in the ranch because Gary and I would be inheriting the “entirety of everything” from our mother. So why should he bother to do any work on the ranch or be involved in ranch affairs. In the early years Paul not only stated this to me and Gary but in addition to any stranger who would listen and possibly give Paul a sympathetic ear. Paul would tell people who would listen he was only participating in the ranch because of his being married to Bernice and the opportunity for him to go tell stories and smoke cigarettes at the Jersey Lilly Cafe in downtown Ingomar with the locals. Paul loved gossiping and smoking his cigarettes. Anyone’s conclusion who had heard the early stories by Paul absolutely knew at some point and time

Milam Basin Creek Ranch would be Gary's and my ranch to do with as we wished after mother's passing.



# Chapter 3

## THE PROMISE



During the 18 summers working on Milam Basin Creek Ranch with my mother and father supervised my every move; miles away from my brother who was raising a family with his wife and his two sons in Bozeman... I would express my concerns about my brother's absence from the ranch to both parents on multiple occasions, especially in the later years. Paul would say it was not his concern because he ***“wasn't a partner in the ranch.”*** But in the case of my mother, Bernice, over and over again would state ***“The Promise!”***. Bernice stating that Gary had the right to raise and watch his kids grow up... be involved in the lives of their children... her Grandchildren. All of which I never disputed or disagreed with. I did express my concerns about my father and his inability to do much in the way of hard labor

or to contribute to the back breaking work a ranch demands, but only to Bernice's deaf ear. Bernice even stated to me on a few occasions how it was "I" that wanted Paul excluded from all ranch dealings and from being a partner. In short the hardships of the ranch were my own fault. I would have to remind Bernice that it was also her wish not to include Paul in the partnership because of her husband's "infidelity" with another woman namely Pat Plimpton and Bernice not being able to trust Paul any longer. Bernice would just give me a disconcerting look and restate "*The Promise*" and add that your brother will eventually be here to help you with the ranch when his kids are grown. I guess for some reassurance to me. It came to a point where I finally issued my concerns about my body wearing down from all the demanding work and injuries from the ranch work. My mother would say, "It's only in your mind and then restate "The Promise"! "The Promise" became Bernice's Hindu prayer mantra... ***no matter what happened in life; upon her passing I would inherit 1/2 of her minerals and 1/2 of her 1/3 of Milam Basin Creek Ranch. My brother would inherit exactly***



**the same as me. “Not a penny difference.”**

After being ***forced out*** of the ranch after the signing of the “By Pass Craig Trust” my imaginary ranch injuries became very evident and real. In the past twenty years I have endured a knee surgery, a shoulder surgery, repeated doctor visits concerning my ruptured testicles, leg vein surgery from a rattlesnake bite, multiple skin cancer surgeries (one dealing with melanoma attached to my skull), cataracts in both eyes from too much sun, and now total hip replacement surgery. My concerns about the ultimate toll the ranch would take on my body have proven to be true. After every surgery I would remember my Mother’s Mantra as the words would echo through my head...*no matter what happened in life*; upon her passing I would inherit 1/2 of her minerals and 1/2 of her 1/3 of Milam Basin Creek Ranch. My brother would inherit exactly the same as me. **“Not a penny difference.”** Bernice would restate “The Promise” and then give me her reassurances that money from the ranch will be there for me to do as “I

needed for my health” for when I got older, especially for life’s unexpected ailments and other health issues. Issues most people would have medical insurance for. In short the promised money to me from Bernice from the ranch for my life’s ailments wasn’t there. As you continue to read this story you will see that I let my family and the family promises they made rob me of 18 years of my life and even more important rob me of the security of the money that was promised to me for my Golden Years. I do not apologize in the least for believing in sanctity of family promises and making family the number one priority in my life concerning the Milam Family.

At one point I met someone special. She was more **special** than any other person I had ever met in my life. She actually cared about me and considered me a **special** person in her life. She met each and every one of my family members. She thought the world of all of them. She **never** had a bad word or harsh statement about anyone she met from my family. This woman was so strong in character my mother was unable to ruin our relationship. Thank God!

Early in 2001 came the moment of ultimate control by my entire family. After I proposed marriage to my future wife a cascade of events unfolded and it involved my mother, my father, my brother and his wife. Shortly after a family gathering in Las Vegas (where I proposed to my future wife) my mother insisted that I not marry her. Why I asked? Because all she wanted was my money. I told my mother she was totally and absolutely wrong. A few months passed after Bernice had demanded that I **not** get married... I take my future wife to a Milam family gathering at Donald Milam's home in Evergreen near Kalispell. I remember that day like yesterday. Réene is introducing my future wife to everyone in the room and stating loudly, "Welcome to the Family!" to everyone who was present at Donald and Joann's house. I was so happy and proud at that moment. Later that very afternoon my mother asks me to immediately return all my holdings and property in the ranch including my contract partnership money back to her. I asked her why she was demanding this of me? Bernice responded by saying, "**Basin Creek can't survive if you don't do this for**

*me.*” I was blasted from one emotional extreme to another in a split second as Bernice further stated that she had talked to Réene, Gary and Paul. ***“They were all in agreement this would be the best thing for Milam Basin Creek Ranch.”*** I will never forget that statement and the order in which mother stated the players to me who were gaslighting and erasing me from the family. My mind was on fire!!! For a second time Mother stated, **“WE ALL AGREED”** that Milam Basin Creek Ranch cannot and will not survive if YOU do not turn back all your holdings in the ranch; especially if you intend to marry that woman! My mother further stated that if I had my wife-to-be sign a prenuptial agreement that she would have written up by her attorney; she might reconsider how she was going to handle “ranch matters concerning me” more so in my favor. Looking back at that day... Bernice’s compassion was overwhelming. As I drove back to Frenchtown I had to wonder what Bernice would have said if I would have directly confronted her about her bullshit statements? Always trying to be the good son I did not confront her that day. All I knew for

sure was that Bernice had totally erased all shred of her integrity with me. Her thoughts and actions were those of a narcissist. Instead of being happy for me, Bernice acted like I had hurt her in some obscure way with my wish to get married.

That day my world was completely turned upside down with what Bernice demanded of me. I guess I shouldn't have been surprised. Bill Seward of all people had given me a warning about things to come a few months prior to this disastrous day. My wife-to-be and I were at the Jersey Lilly eating dinner and discussing life with Bill after a hard day working cows on Basin Creek. Bill gave my wife-to-be a two inch button with his picture on it as a blessing for our upcoming marriage. Bill congratulated the both of us on our engagement. Then Bill took me off to the side into the Jersey Lilly dance hall and gave me a short, fatherly talk. Bill with his soft voice gave me a stern warning... but I did not realize it was a warning at the time. Bill with his soft voice and kind smile tells me how he united Paul and Bernice when he worked at a bar at the Gallatin

Gateway in Bozeman one night long ago. Because of him, Bernice and Paul fell in love and got married. So in Bill's mind his connection to Paul and Bernice was a very close one. Over the past "almost 20 years" Bill states, "I have gotten to know you and your parents pretty well. People have a tendency to talk in bars... so I get to know people better than most." All people change with time Bill stated. Paul and Bernice are not the same people I knew when they first met in Bozeman. Bill looked into my eyes and then said, *"I don't know if you believe in God or not and I am not going to tell you what to do... only you can do that. But your life as you know it will never be the same ever again!"* I asked Bill what he meant by that? Bill never responded directly to my question. Instead Bill says, *"I over hear things when people meet for breakfast, coffee or cribbage. Things maybe I shouldn't hear... Paul has been saying things at the morning coffee and breakfast gatherings that concern me."* Then Bill tells me to read Luke 12:53 from the Bible and to read it at least three times to get an understanding "his" meaning. After you have read and tried to understand the passage that

I have given you then tell yourself that things are going to move forward and that the two of you will build a happy life together. Much is yet to be discovered, and the way of life with Paul and Bernice you were following previously has clearly turned out to be an unfulfilling one. Especially with what they are planning on doing to you and your wife-to-be. So use this as a chance (your marriage) to change your direction in life in a positive way.

That night I had a hollow feeling inside of myself after listening to Bill... truthfully I was baffled and truly clueless in understanding what Bill was trying to tell me. I guess I should have read Luke 12:53, but I never did until years later. All I did was write about the night with Bill and what was said in my journal. Bill was a soothsayer whom I didn't give any credence to.

Just a few days later friends of mine Patty Erickson and C.M. Coffee at the Jersey Lilly stated to me that "a load of horseshit was coming my way... so to watch my backside concerning what Paul was up to concerning me and Basin Creek." After

asking them both point blank what they meant by that statement. All that C.M. Coffee would tell me was I was in a bad family poker game. Paul was now dealing the cards with Bernice's permission and when the last card was dealt to me I would be the only one with a losing hand. C.M.'s final statement of fact to me was that Paul stated the worst that could happen is he would lose "his ranch mechanic on Basin Creek." C.M. stated Paul needed to get a clue in life... "In truth if you do what you say you are going to do..." "Paul, you won't have a son anymore." C.M. was entirely correct. C.M. said Paul just smiled and looked away and left the Jersey Lilly that afternoon.

At this point I only wished that Paul and Bernice would tell me to my face what they were (especially Paul) telling others behind my back while playing cribbage or socializing at the Jersey Lilly. I had to ask myself why Ingomar gossip was sounding more and more like the truth?

I was still putting Family first, which would make me come in last every time



concerning our so called “Family Partnership”. For some reason I couldn’t worry about it because I was more focused on marrying the love of my life and focusing on “our” new future hoping we would grow old together and with all our adventures in life it would be like a “Fairy Tale coming True”.



# Chapter 4

## SEPTEMBER 11TH, 2001



On June 22nd, 2001 Michelle and I got married. The second most memorable event in my life happened on September 11th, 2001. I am sure this infamous date is remembered by everyone in the world for one horrifying, tragic afternoon in New York that changed world history forever. That very day, September 11th, 2001, changed my history concerning what my identity as a family member was going to be going into the future and what my part was going to become in “Our Family” ranch.

Paul, Gary, Wayne Vannice, Hank Stocker (Hank was our Sheepman hired by the Milam’s at that time), and I worked the ewes that day. Shots, mouthing, and paint brands for the winter. Shortly after we concluded the work for the day Hank asked

me to come down to his house. He stated he had something he wanted me to see. As soon as I was safely inside their residence Bobbi (Hank's wife) offered me a chunk of chocolate. Bobbi was sipping her daily beer and Hank proceeded to put his signature curved pipe in his mouth. Lighting the sweet tobacco and letting the overbearing smoke fill the air. Hank pulled a chair out from the dining room table and then braces his hands on the the chair's seat back. Looking directly at me Hank states, "***I think you know Bernice is sick... not only physically sick, but she is not right upstairs. Just so you know... she is Mentally ILL! Just like her sister Marie and brother Merton were...***" I knew Bernice was struggling with her lung issues and I had to admit to myself I was concerned about her mental stability after some of our conversations off and on during the past 4 years especially if she had been drinking beer, but I never voiced that concern to Bobbi or Hank? Deep down I felt Bernice's mental condition was a direct result of her lung condition (lack of oxygen to her brain) and the beer only exasperated her condition. I never thought her lung issues would effect

her good judgement about things concerning the ranch nor “The Promise” which she had made continuously to me over those past four years and the prior eighteen years.

I did not know how wrong I was! I responded by saying to Hank, “What are you talking about?” Hank responded by saying, ***“I have heard things... I am going to be direct and to the point... I want you to know that your family has turned Bernice against you and I. Paul and Gary are are planning on sending the both of us down the river!”*** I was in “total disbelief!” I could only say, “What?” Hank spoke with a quivering voice, ***“You and I are done... it’s over! It is just a matter of time.”*** Bobbi echoed Hanks words by loudly cheering, ***“Hank knows, Craig... Hank knows!.. we heard it from Gary’s in-laws the Hamer’s. Paul told Jan Hamer that Bernice was not competent to handle her own affairs or “anything” concerning the ranch... so Gary and Paul are making all the ranch decisions. But there is way more...”*** Bobbi’s crying and sobbing stopped her statement of fact mid sentence when Paul

steps into their house for a cup of coffee. Bobbi, who was as hard as leather, had crocodile tears in her eyes as she finished off her beer. This was definitely a real moment in time for myself, Hank, and Bobbi. Not facing the reality of the moment I looked at Hank and told him I thought everything was going to be OK for the both of us and that I had not heard a word contrary from “anyone” in my family. Hank and Bobbi had friends throughout Garfield and Rosebud Counties and of course Paul loved to talk. I absolutely know Paul did say something to Jan Hamer, especially after what Bill Seward told me that night in the Jersey Lilly. Paul loved an audience to gossip and bullshit to... no matter who it might be. Looking at this situation there was no doubt in my mind I was going to be the last to know about any of this. After all “The Promise” still echoed through my head for some reassurance. The more I thought about Hank and Bobbi’s statements the more the memories from my experiences at Cherry Springs in 1971 concerning Bernice and Paul’s lies surfaced in my brain. Was the Mysse Curse becoming the Milam Curse? Indeed this would prove to be a true reality!

Any and all ranch discussions should have been between Bernice, Gary and I. Paul was not suppose to be a part of any decisions concerning Basin Creek operations. Maybe Bernice had forgiven Paul for his past adulterous actions with another woman. Who knows? Yet I had noticed the frequency of hush-hush talks between Gary and Paul had increased exponentially over the past few years as Bernice got sicker from her illness. Paul was becoming more vocal about ranch issues and was acting as if my partnership in the ranch was meaningless to him by his dictatorial attitude. Paul was becoming empowered thanks to Gary's prompting and puppeteering.

Even though Hank, Bobbi, and I were interrupted by Paul walking into Hank's house to get a cup of coffee with everyone looking a different direction as the conversation was instantly over. I still thought there was more to the story. Later that winter I got away from my teaching duties to help Hank with the feeding of the ewes for a few days. My hope was that I could get more details about Hank's statements of fact about me

concerning Paul's statements to Jan and Blair Hamer's. Hank never repeated himself or wanted to talk about what he had heard or about what he knew... again stating that the words spoken by Bobbi and him were gospel and to watch my ass... Hank followed up by saying, "***I can see what is coming down the road for "me and Bobbi."***"

After returning from my winter visit on the Milam Basin Creek Ranch I took an immediate trip to Bigfork and asked Paul and Bernice specifically about what I had heard, but not stating exactly who I had heard it from. Of course both denied any conversations between Paul and Jan or Blair Hamer had ever happened *with an assurance from both Paul and Bernice that "Milam Basin Creek Ranch was Gary's and my ranch to operate and own when Bernice was gone."* I knew better and I could tell by Paul's reaction to my question he was lying through his teeth, but how could I prove it. I took Bernice off to the side in the kitchen and stated to her, "*You promised me that Dad would never be a voice in the operation of the ranch after the 1971 fiasco. I know that this is*

*absolutely not true, especially with Gary and Dad doing the things behind my back and not including me or you.*” Bernice says, **“It’s just my imagination and to grow up.”** Looking into Bernice’s eyes in my heart I could tell she was lying to me. There was much more to the story she was not telling me.

The very next spring after lambing we were once again on the ranch working the sheep. Paul comes up to Gary and asks Gary if he had talked to me about Hank. Quickly Gary takes me off into a corner and states that “they” had decided to sell off all the sheep. I asked both Paul and Gary who is “they?”, why are we doing this, and if Bernice was in agreement with the decision. With no response... once again I asked why are we doing this? Paul responded, **“Just do as you are told!”**, trying to be the big man on campus... the authoritarian. Gary says we can’t afford Hank and Bobbi anymore. I stated to both Paul and Gary that Bernice told me the wages were being covered by the sale of the lambs each Fall and this was part of her Mysse heritage that Bernice wanted to preserve at all cost. All of this was totally new



to me. Gary stated emphatically to me that my perceptions were not true and we, “Basin Creek”, could no longer afford Hank and Bobbi. Again Paul tells me to do as I was told. I was almost ballistic with Paul’s dictatorial statements, but kept my emotions and thoughts inside myself. At that very moment I remembered back to a December winter day leaving Harlowton, Montana in 1971... and all the bullshit and lies Paul tried to push down my throat. I was totally uncomfortable at that point and really did not know what to say or do. I did not want to push Paul’s “Screaming Tirade Baby” button. But that statement by Paul said everything, Paul trying to treat me as an adolescent while the power duo of Paul and Gary are making a power play including me without me really being in the know of what the situation should really be. I could not stop thinking whether or not this undertaking Gary and I were going to commit against Hank was Bernice’s wish as a third partner in the ranch or not, since I had not talked to her in person. Had Gary and Paul taken over as the voice of Bernice because of her mental illness? **I wrongly concluded** that Gary and Paul must have taken control over ranch

matters with her being so mentally unstable. At this point I knew my days were numbered on the ranch... just as Hank stated. *Then at that moment Paul states, “That this ranch is going to be yours and Gary’s one day (Point and Case of how Paul bullshitted, lied, and manipulated his way through everyday life knowing otherwise)... and tells me to work together with your brother.”* Then a split second later Paul states, *“I will have no part in this firing thing with Hank!”* (Even though I could tell he was a prime conspirator in the action Gary and I were going to take!) Paul then states, *“So it is up to the both of you (Gary and myself) to tell Hank we are selling the sheep and you need to do it now!”*

Paul was at that moment a true coward and showing in full flower his unscrupulous nature; just as Gary was. Paul disappeared into some dark corner of the barn as Gary and I walk off to find Hank. We find Hank coming from his house. Gary tells Hank we need to talk. Hank sits down on a old cottonwood stump as Gary explains in short and concise words “the family” has decided

to sell off all the sheep. Hank's face dropped and he simply stated, ***"If there's no more sheep... then I am done!"*** Hank's cold eyes and expression said it all. Hank turned and asked me if Bernice knew? I said I did not know for sure. Hank gave me a second look that was even colder. That day left me with a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach. As I drove back to Plains with Wayne. I knew these things to be true. Paul and Gary were conspiring together as one entity, coming to agreements, making ranch decisions without me being involved... meaning either Paul, Bernice or both Paul and Bernice had put Gary in charge of the ranch and its evolution into the future. I was no longer a voice or in truth a third partner in the ranch. Bernice had done *"her thing"* to me as she had promised.

After I got back to Frenchtown I called Bernice to ask her what was "her" reasoning was for firing Hank? Bernice simply stated, ***"Don't question what "we" are doing!"*** I asked her a few more questions. Such as *"didn't I deserve a say in what was going to happen to Hank?"* Why didn't someone discuss this with me earlier instead of at the

last moment? With Bernice responding, ***“Your Father is not home... he’s at coffee and I do not want to discuss it right now. It is over!”*** Bernice hangs up the phone without saying goodbye.

Was Hank’s firing just was one step or a series of steps in the process of my eventual elimination from Basin Creek Ranch? Absolutely... no doubt it was! What could I do about it? I had to wonder. After all Gary and I had agreed (***Gary and I made a brother pact***) he and I would run the ranch together as brothers-partners after Mom passed away; to truly see the ranch’s real money making potential. I realized that the brother pact or the agreement between Gary and I, which once was a “family-brother absolute”, had turned into an ugly lie as well. Gary broke the pact. I should have seen the complete picture at this point, but I have never been good playing life chess and guessing what someone’s next move will be. After all I was one mind working against four minds. What I will never understand is how Bernice, Paul, and Gary could tell so many obvious lies to

me and never feel the least bit bad about what they had said.

**SIDE NOTE:** *Some time after the dismissal or firing of Hank I talked to Hank and Bobbi after they had moved to Anaconda. We sat together for lunch one day and I let Bobbi and Hank reminisce about the good days working for Dale Krieder and the days with the Milams in Garfield County. We never discussed the firing at Basin Creek. After Bobbi passed away Hank went to a care center in Miles City where he lived out the remainder of his life. Hank called me in October of 2013 to see how I was doing. He simply stated he was in his final act of life but had no regrets concerning his life on this earth. He wanted me to know that he had no hard feelings towards me because he knew I had a kind heart. Saying that he knew I really did not want to be a part of his firing at the ranch, but it happened and I had to live with it and also live with the fact it was my family who did this to him. Hank also knew the worst from my family was yet to come and that they would “try to destroy my life.” Hank said, “He felt so sorry for me!” I do not know what I said to*

*Hank at that moment, but I knew the times Hank and I shared and because of the times working together during the years we owned Basin Creek and after we purchased Krieder's meant a lot to the both of us. I realized Hank and I had become extremely good distant friends and I would miss him. I appreciated his concern for my well being and my wife's. Even so I will regret to my final day on this Earth that I betrayed Hank's and my friendship in the name of blind faith and trust in the Milam Family.*

Interestingly my mother never ever told me she loved me at any point in my life. When I would ask her why, she would always say it was “**because we were Norwegian and as Norwegians we never vocalize our love in words... we only show it in our actions.**” When I told her that I would not give back the 18 years of my hard work represented by the contracted partnership money without an rational, valid explanation... my mother never responded but her future actions did. She showed me that her type of mother's Norwegian love is

like nothing else anyone could or should  
experience in this world.



# Chapter 5

## THE BEGINNING OF THE END



The day I married my wife was my proudest and the happiest day of my life. After my wife and I were married my mother started a completely new phase in her control. Mother would use the fact that I was married and recently retired from teaching as a leverage point for her control. In her mind I should be living on the ranch 100% of the time separated geographically from my wife. Yet Bernice made it perfectly clear to me that I was to give every penny I had been promised and earned back to Basin Creek Ranch or in fact back to her. Even my wife stated to me that my mother was way out of line in her thinking.

One night Bernice stated that I was to immediately head to the ranch to help with lambing. This event is probably what caused



Hank's demise as sheep manager on our ranch. I calmly said, ***"I would if my brother, Gary, was there lambing with me."*** I could hear my father trying to pacify mother while he was on the other phone line. Almost screaming Bernice said, ***"You will do what I tell you or I will change my Will."*** Julius's words echoed in my head from 25 years earlier. Her Last Will and Testament was to express "The Promise" she had held over my head all those years working on the ranch. I had never seen Bernice's Will only heard second hand from my father what was contained in it. Again calmly I said, ***"I was not going to the ranch. I had my own family and house to look after. I told mother I would appreciate the same consideration to be given to me, concerning participating in the ranch, as was given to Gary and his family."*** After all we hadn't even been married for a full year yet. Her last words to me in that conversation were... ***"Have it your way then!"*** Bernice did not say her normal goodbye, but instead just hung up the phone. At that very moment it was very evident to me that in Bernice's mind I was just an object to be

used... Bernice's entire intent as long as I lived was to control and dominate me... she knew she could not control or dominate my wife... and now she knew my days of dependence on her and Paul's lies, false promises and manipulations were over.

About three months after that conversation out of the blue came a phone call from my mother. Bernice stated (of course while Paul was on the other line): ***“After discussing this matter at great length with your brother’s wife, your brother, and your father I have decided to create a trust giving all my holdings to my Grandchildren.”*** Bernice once again reinforces the order of the players involved in this decision. Incredible! When did Paul and Réene become Basin Creek Ranch partners? Bernice's decision to forever *eliminate me from the ranch and the family*. A Trust! (My words: A By-Pass-Trust of all and every Asset from Craig). I asked her why she was doing this... she replied ***“because you are not having any children and you do not have any children of your own.”*** I specifically questioned her about “The Promise”. By her

voice I could tell Bernice knew she had lost all control of me and my wife. Bernice had done everything in her power to maintain this control. After changing the rules of the game with her statement about me not having children Bernice had justified her act of injustice concerning “The Promise.” Bernice was vicious about it. After losing all means of control over me I am sure in Bernice’s mind the end justified the means. **Now that the power struggle was over concerning “The Promise”... the game changed for Bernice and it was now became the time for her to try to destroy my life as she did concerning ALL aspects of “The Promise.”** With this final lie I should have no longer believed anything Bernice, Paul, Gary, or Réene had to say to me or to my wife in the time we had left where we interacted. ***The simple fact was they were all liars.***

I stated to Bernice that her decision wasn’t fair nor justified because I couldn’t have children. After repeated injuries to my midsection with cows kicking me in the nuts while working on the ranch, I was sterile and she knew that. Besides I told her I was

almost 50 years old and really did not want the responsibilities of children. I should have said, **“If you remember clearly... you forbid me to ever marry anyone once upon at time.”** But I did not make that statement, it would have made things all the worse at that moment. Remember I was still trying to be the good son. Mother replied by saying that that was not her problem. Emphasizing **“YOU made that choice.”** I made the choice to have my testicles smashed by a cow kicking me... REALLY! At that very moment Mother had reinforced the fact that she had broken the ultimate promise which kept me on the ranch for 18 years and that she had absolutely no soul and no heart... “The Promise”, which was nothing but a lie, was broken. I knew in my heart that Bernice no longer had any conscience of what was right and what was wrong. I also knew Bernice, Paul and Gary nor Réene would never feel bad for anything they did from this point on.

Consulting legal advise... I was adamantly advised not to sign any documents involving Bernice’s By-Pass-

Trust. My attorney stated that Bernice was going to disinherit me; negating her need for a Last Will and Testament which should have included me. In addition my attorney told me I had every right to challenge Bernice's By-Pass-Trust in a court of law even if I did sign it. My attorney stated a second time..."**Do Not sign the By-Pass-Trust.**" Obvious to anyone with common sense.

So I drove up to Bigfork to confront Bernice about her decision and our recent phone discussion. Visiting Bernice at her Bigfork home, hoping to talk to both Paul and Bernice. I find only Bernice in the house. Paul had gone up for coffee to "run" away from the confrontation. Something Paul would do over and over throughout his life... run away from confrontations, but I have stated that before. I began by stating I **would not** sign the By-Pass-Trust. At that point mother invoked the "**Mother Love Card**". "**If you love me... you will do this for me!**", she stated. Bernice's final act of manipulation, coercion and exploitation of my life was voiced. I realized that as long as Bernice was alive my "**imaginary sins to her and her family**"

would never be forgiven. So I said I would sign the By-Pass-Trust. I asked Bernice one more question, ***“You were planning on doing this to me eventually whether I married or whether I stayed single weren’t you?”*** Bernice just looked out the kitchen window and then asked me to leave. *I was no longer in denial about Bernice’s toxic intent with me and the decades of her reciting the lie of “The Promise” to me.* At that moment I knew my mother was not a great mother... perhaps not even a good mother. Her emotional abuse ranged from average to downright impressively creative as shown by her use of “The Promise” as a means of leverage with me. So I had to ask, ***“From the first time you recited “The Promise” it was nothing but a lie to get me to do everything on the ranch you, Paul, and Gary could not do... wasn’t it?”*** Bernice simply looked at me once again and said, ***“I told you to leave... now do it!”*** Then she looked away staring into empty space. Bernice had gotten what she wanted.

Bernice’s silence spoke volumes about her true self. As a child and now as an adult, I

always felt that my parents were hiding things, weren't telling me the truth or only partial truths, and that they weren't expressing their true feelings. How could Bernice, Paul, Gary and Réene feel the least bit good about themselves in life! As long as I live I will have to ponder that question.

Because of the loving relationship I had with my wife, I finally understood and in my heart I knew what true love is. The toxic love demonstrated by my parents and brother were nothing like the love that my wife and I shared. As I drove back to Frenchtown that day I came to the realization that neither Paul or Bernice could not or did not know how to be loving. This is one of the saddest truths I have ever had to accept in my life. But as I recognized this fact and acknowledged my parents' limitations, and the life losses I suffered because of them... I decided from that moment on I would open a door in my life for people who will love me the way I deserve and want to be loved. Being a child of toxic parents, I grew up feeling tremendous confusion about what love means, the true meaning of Family, and how it's supposed to

feel. Thanks to Bernice a clarity in life and in love came to me that afternoon. Loving behavior doesn't grind you down, keep you off balance, or create feelings of self-hatred. Love doesn't hurt, it feels good. Loving behavior nourishes your emotional well-being. When someone is being loving to you, you feel accepted, cared for, valued, and respected. Genuine love creates feelings of warmth, pleasure, safety, stability, and inner peace. At that moment I understood why Bernice and Paul did extremely unloving things to me in the name of love... in the name of "Family"... I fully understood how my "Toxic Parents" had imposed unobtainable goals, impossible expectations, and ever-changing rules on me throughout my childhood and adult years. With Bernice invoking the "Mother Love Card" I realized finally I had my freedom from all the toxicity and craziness declared in the name of family and perhaps for the first time in my life to enjoy my own life and to set my own standards for living my life without toxic interference.



At the signing of the Craig By-Pass-Trust I also incorrectly thought someone else in the family would stand up for me in my defense and not sign the Craig By-Pass-Trust Document; I was totally stupid in thought and totally wrong. Bernice had already signed the document. Paul and Gary were more than happy to sign the Craig By-Pass-Trust in front of the lawyer... they were of the same mind at that point and their thoughts did not involve me... only their self interests. At this point I realized I could not change who Bernice, Paul, Gary and Réene had become and what they had done to me. ***I was officially erased from the Milam family with the signing of the Craig By-Pass-Trust and forced out of the ranch.***

Was Bernice mentally stable... was her mental health an issue... it didn't matter at this point to me... my signature was on the By-Pass-Trust. Everything became crystal clear. No matter what I said... no matter what I did... nothing would change the things to come. The snowball had started its very long journey down the hill. As had happened with GrandDad Mysse's family we were a family

no more. The Mysse Curse had come full circle and now had become the Milam Curse. At that very moment in time I was sad, hurt, angry, mad, disappointed and to a large degree in disbelief of what my family jointly had done to me and to my wife. I also knew I could not ever change the minds of Bernice, Paul, Gary or Réene. The ranch... the money.. guaranteed by “The Promise” was all theirs and only theirs to do with as they wished. Not a one of them could see any issue or fault in their actions towards me. Family should mean that your father, your mother, your brother and his wife will accept you no matter who you are, where there is no hatred or judgement. Promises always kept. The love of your family should be unconditional and everyone should try their best to provide all the support they can physically, emotionally, and spiritually to one another. Yet, I guess even in the best of times there are no absolutes in life. I knew one truth to be an absolute fact as I drove home from Kalispell after signing the “Craig By-Pass-Trust” that day. **The Milams were no longer a Family in any sense of the word!** Bernice’s “Milam Family” collapsed just as it

happened to her “Mysse Family”... her birth family! My entire existence in the Milam Family was based on whatever the Family needed from me... I did my best to provide it. *That is the problem putting Family First... I taught them that I came second. I was no longer useful to any of them in any way shape or form.*

It was extremely hard for me to comprehend the fact that I was fooled by a hypocritical mother who lied to me about a promise and then to find out the rest of my family followed in her path. I was lied to by my family who I loved and trusted. I couldn't believe I had deceived myself of the truth. My initial natural reaction was of denial and not to listen to the reality of the moment or anything to the contrary. Over the next few minutes everything became crystal clear.

This was the loneliest moment in my life and it made me totally sick driving back to Frenchtown that day. As I increased the speed of my pickup I knew if I hit the bridge abutment fast enough all this pain would be over. I knew that my suicide would end my

pain. Then I realized there was a seed of hope, my wife, waiting for me at our new home. I did not want to cause her any pain. She had gone through enough in her life. I decided I was not going to add any misery or pain to her life. I decided this was not how my life story... our life story was going to end. And so my and my wife's lives and our love for each other went on...

It was time for me to take back my life from the people that were causing me so much pain, taking away and using so much of my life, and making my life miserable. Up to this point my family had been writing my life story. It was time. I said over and over to myself that this was my LIFE and I was going to be the author of what was to come for the remaining days of my life... not Bernice, not Paul, not Gary and definitely not Reene.



# Chapter 6

## ERASED



After my mother's passing in 2002 it was approximately 3 years that went by with Paul, Gary and Réene managing the ranch hiding behind the "Craig By-Pass-Trust." Early on my Paul knew what Bernice had done was totally wrong. Paul didn't want to talk about the trust or what Bernice, he, Gary and Réene had done to me. Instead Paul made a multitude of promises to amend for his wife's heartlessness and the family's. More of Paul's lies. Paul tried hiding from the fact he had anything to do with the trust. Paul would say to me, ***"That Trust was between you and your Mother... I had nothing to do with it."*** How could Paul tell a more incredible bullshit lie? *I would respond by saying you and Gary coerced Mother into breaking her Promise with me concerning the ranch, then had her lawyer write up the By-*

*Pass-Trust, and then the both of you signed the By-Pass-Trust didn't you? Both you and Gary were complicit with Bernice and the By-Pass-Trust. I am sorry I do not believe you. You are still playing the same sick game Bernice played. All of you lied to me... deny it... Paul would never answer; only look away and mutter "Bullshit!". Interestingly: In Paul's last written letter to me explaining to me what a truly sick individual I was; he actually confirmed that he lied to me about his and Gary's involvement in the By-Pass-Trust. Paul and Gary had everything to do with it.*

Paul's repeated statement, **"That By-Pass-Trust was between you and your Mother... I had nothing to do with it."**... *was refuted with his own written statement in his last letter to me. Paul stated that Gary and the "rest" of the family supported Bernice's actions towards me since I had no children of my own. Then trying to validate the families implementing of the By-Pass-Trust by speaking for Granddad Mysse and falsely stating "Granddad Mysse's intent when he gave me shares in Cherry Creek was for me to have children".* **Once again**

**Paul speaking for someone else to support his lies. One of Paul's Most Incredible Bullshit Statements! Paul must have forgotten that I signed over my five shares in the Cherry Creek Sheep Company to Bernice so she could divide her shares equally between her two sons. Isn't it amazing that Paul conveniently forgot that fact!**

Later Paul stated to me that ***“Your mother wasn't quite herself mentally or physically in her last few years!”*** Incredible! This is how Paul justified Bernice's, Paul's and Gary's actions towards me. It was evident to me both Paul and Gary had taken advantage of a person who was more than likely mentally ill and incapable of rational thought? Sick! In the years to follow Paul would make additional statements or promises. Like you will get half of my house in Bozeman when I die. I would love for you to have my 30-30... you know I won't need it anymore when I am gone. Don't worry about your Model A and the Model T... I will keep my promise to you and I will give them back to you when I am gone. May I borrow your

.38 special and .357 pistols; you can have them back when I am gone. The best promise, Paul made, was that he had made a huge amount of money in the stock market and all those fortunes would be Gary's and mine someday. *Both you and Gary will be very wealthy and that will make up for what happened with the ranch and your mother.* **Even though Paul was my father, as you will see, liars make the best promises.**

After my mother's passing I did nothing to contribute to the ranch either in physical work or thought. Why should I... it was very evident that Gary "and his family" had been put in charge of Milam Basin Creek with the signing of the the By-Pass-Trust. Bernice's and Paul's wish was for Gary to inherit everything. So in my mind it was Gary's turn to carry the load and responsibility's related to the ranch. My last visit to Basin Creek proved out that Russ Milam had become the apparent heir to Bernice's 18 year Promise to me. No big surprise. At that point I figured I would wait on the sidelines just as Gary did. In hope I could at least get the money owed from our partnership contract. My hands were



tied. With all the lies I had already endured living with “The Promise”... The “Craig By-Pass-Trust” how could I trust any member of my family... simply put... **I could not.**

After a couple of years of me not participating physically or working my ass off on the ranch **“Gary asked me if “they” (meaning Paul and himself) could buy out my interest in the ranch.** Gary and Paul both knew I was not happy in the least with what had happened family-wise to this point. Obviously they didn’t care. In fact it wasn’t a buy out at this point it had gone beyond that. It was the final stage of me **“being totally forced out of the ranch which Bernice, Paul, Réene, and Gary started with the By-Pass-Trust.”** I was no longer of any value to the “Family” since my wife and I decided I would focus on us and the work required around our Frenchtown residence... not the ranch. Keep in mind the actual money my brother had contributed into the ranch was the same as me... **Nothing!** I repeat **NOTHING!** Everything concerning the ranch was funded and supported by our mother with the promise of it **“being split in its**

***entirety between the two boys.***” That was the Promise. Yet, now Gary acted as if it was his hard earned money buying me out. When in fact it was my earned money that was lost through the By-Pass-Trust. Gary did not want any lawyers involved (“**The Black Coats**”... *Where in heavens name did Gary come up with that bullshit term?*) with the dissolution of my assets from the ranch. I have my ideas in retrospect what he and Paul were planning concerning my buyout and the reason why neither Gary or Paul wanted me to contact a lawyer. True to form Paul had become Gary’s puppet. I had very plausible ideas related to what Gary and Paul were up to, but these suspicions would only be confirmed when Paul passed away.

The dissolution of my assets out of the ranch were some of the most contentious days of my life. In the beginning Paul would get on the phone with Gary listening in on a second land line puppeteering to Paul his requests concerning what I was to give up concerning the ranch. Amazing... Paul couldn’t even speak for himself! After all I had deeded property and buildings in Ingomar

which in theory should have been mine for all time. Both Paul and Gary's intent was to erase me from existence from Ingomar, Milam Basin Creek Ranch and the Milam Family. Treating me not as family but like an opponent in a boxing ring that needed not only to be knocked down, but killed, dragged from the ring and erased from this Earth. Gary insisting my contribution of *"18 summers" of work on the ranch and the hours of care I gave to the animals (and Bernice and Paul) in reality "were inconsequential"*. In fact as Gary stated, ***"My family and I did just as much work or more to get the ranch where it is now as you did!"*** At that moment I realized Gary had no "F..."ing clue what I had had to put up with over the course of those 18 years working on the ranch with both Paul and Bernice coming up with daily – hour to hour projects which neither was willing or able to do by themselves. I was the ranch work horse... as one Ingomar local (Lee Cool) told me... ***"I was living with a family of three chiefs and I was the only Indian doing ALL the work!"***... I guess I should have thought about that statement in more depth at the time.

With the toxicity and the shit attitudes both Paul and Gary displayed I knew all shreds of “Family” and human decency between us had been erased. I asked about hunting rights and at that point Paul stated it was not a topic of discussion unless I gave my mineral rights and royalties to the nephews. Incredible... was Paul out of his mind? Or was Gary? The minerals and royalties are still mine and will be until I die. I still hunt when and where I want to in the home Julius and I use to roam. After all I know Rosebud and Garfield Counties like the back of my hand. I was taught by the best poacher-survivalist ever placed on this Earth. Thank you Julius... you taught me and taught me well.

I learned from Paul and Gary that even when something they said wasn't a lie... it didn't mean their statements weren't deceptive in nature. I realized then that Gary was the “Puppet Master” and my parents had become his way of speaking and getting actions through them by using only small portions of the truth in order to deceive me and to finally get what he ultimately always

wanted. **“Everything!”** I could no longer refuse to believe what was true.

Gary and Réene completely cut all communication with myself and my wife after negotiations began on the buy out or dissolution of my assets in the ranch. Gary would have loved for me to get nothing for the ranch, but I wanted what was promised to me by our partnership contract and what was promised to me by my mother even though I realized her original promise to me would not ever happen. Paul lamented multiple times about that **“God Damn lawyer friend of yours was screwing us.”** No worse than how Bernice, Paul, Gary and Réene had screwed me with the By-Pass-Trust. And NO... the only one that ultimately got screwed was me... that was the plan all along by the Milam family... that is what happens living in a narcissistic-toxic family. And Yes... That lawyer did become my one of my best friends after the dissolution was signed. That lawyer as it turns out is the most kind, honest, and caring friend anyone could call a friend in this world. Gary decided the best route in negotiations with me was to

pretend he wasn't involved in what Paul said to me concerning the buy out. Even though you could hear Gary unapologetically whispering to Paul puppeteering or telling him what to say to me on every phone call. Incredible! To me it was unbelievable that Paul could not speak on his own behalf without help? I had to wonder about Paul's mental health during these so called negotiations. My years on the ranch and living with Paul made me question his mental stability due to his constant pathological lying.

Not a single word was ever spoken between my brother and I after those negotiations... Gary didn't even have the decency to send a card to my wife and I at Christmas time in the name of his family after Bernice's passing. Not one Christmas card for almost 20 years. Gary should have been more careful about how far he pushed me away from the family. After a short while I quit thinking or even worrying about the family members that ignored me and acted like I didn't matter in their world. Instead I chose to love the ones in my world who were always there for me and loved me back.

Then interestingly Christmas cards from Réene started arriving after Paul passed away and when Gary made it perfectly clear to me that I was not going to be a part of Paul's passing and his reinforcing the fact that I was not included in Paul's Last Will and Testament. Not a part of his family, the new "Milam Family" in any way. Reinforcing what Paul told me in his last phone call to me in Paul's Final Payback statement to me. In my mind these once a year Christmas reminders from Réene represented the equivalent to a football touchdown **celebration or a taunting** which occurs at basketball games. Normal people do not go around destroying the dreams and promises made to a family member... then relishing in it... as Réene tried to do with her questionable yearly Christmas card reminder. Some of the most poisonous people come disguised as family. All Reene was doing was trying to remind me each year that Paul gave me nothing in his Will. Even if Réene's intentions were honorable, which I sincerely doubt... I was eliminated from the family in mind and thought by Paul's own words and by Gary's actions towards me.

I have never opened even one of Réene's Christmas cards and never will. Réene doesn't understand you don't poke a stick into a grizzly bear's ass once a year and expect good things to happen before you get out of the forest. Simply put... Réene does not understand that I have no desire to even think about keeping people like her and Gary in my life when they made absolutely no attempt in keeping me in their life or even cared about me when I was a part of their lives. The irreversible damage is done. Gary, Réene, Russell, and Bradley will never understand the damage they did to me, that is until the same thing is done to them. For me and my wife the Milam Curse is over and in the past, but as long as Milam Basin Creek exists the curse will hang like a black cloud over any Milam who sets foot on Milam Basin Creek Ranch in Garfield County.





# Chapter 7

## ANOTHER FAMILY PROMISE IGNORED



Four years before my father passed away my Uncle Bill passed away in Forsyth. Bill Straw was married to Marie Mysse, who was my mother's sister. Marie sold her part of Cherry Creek for \$280,000 to Kevin Brewer. Then Bill and Marie bought the Hein's place near Forsyth with her money. As Marie told my mother, my father, Sivert and Janet and their boys, ***her final request (her final dying wish) was that the Hein's place be split equally into shares so each nephew would inherit indirectly her part of Cherry Creek when she passed away.*** Marie passed away many years before Bill's passing. Everyone in the family knew what Marie's final request or wish was and who was to inherit her part of Cherry Creek via the Hein's place after both her and Bill had passed away.

Many years before my Uncle Bill had passed away; Bill and I were going up to the bluffs over Forsyth taking a look at his cows and repairing some of his fence. Bill asked me whether or not I could trust my father in every way and of course I told him I thought so... but my immediate thoughts were that I wasn't sure anymore... thinking back to Paul's past actions and lies (after all Paul and I still communicated by telephone when it was convenient for each of us... both Paul and I were trying to keep maybe some family connection alive between the two of us after Bernice was laid to rest)... not knowing the intent of Bill's question. I did not want Bill to think or know that in reality we were not family anymore. Everyone in the Milam and Mysse families were well aware that a part of Uncle Bill's estate would be passed on equally to each nephew on Bernice's side and on Sivert's side as Marie requested and as she notified all the family members prior to her death.

Early one morning I received a call that Uncle Bill had passed away from Uncle Bill's nephew. I called Paul to inform him of the

news. The first words out of Paul's mouth were, ***“Do you think that you and Gary will get the land that “Old Haney” and Marie promised?”*** My father was good at making up derogatory names for people... even if they were family. I wonder what my nickname was?

After Uncle Bill's Last Will and Testament was issued. A sudden and huge wall of silence was built up by Paul between the two of us. My first question to Paul was if he had heard anything concerning Bill's Last Will and Testament? Paul repeatedly said, “No!” Paul kept the matter completely quiet for months. I found out from a friend in Forsyth that Bill Straw did have a Last Will and Testament and he had heard that Paul was the sole beneficiary. What a way to find this news out! It truly established Paul, Gary, Reene and I were no longer family in any sense of the word. And once again Paul was lying to me.

I called Paul and confronted him once again about the Will and asked him to please tell the truth. Finally Paul confessed there

was a Will by Bill Straw. I asked Paul what was in the will. He said nothing. I asked him for a copy of the will. Paul stated it was none of my business and my name was not mentioned in the will so I did not need a copy of Bill's Will. I was not happy with Paul trying to keep me in the dark. Not happy at all. I knew Paul was lying again and talking in circles hoping the subject would go away.

I visited Paul at his house in Bozeman just before Christmas and asked him what was going on with Uncle Bill's estate and the Will? I asked to see a copy of Bill's Will. Paul told me that Uncle Bill had given him everything and there was no need for me to look at Bill's Will. I asked Paul two questions. ***I asked him if he was going to abide by Marie's wishes? What were you going to do with the money?*** Paul never responded to the questions directed at him; instead Paul stated that he might give the money to his Grand kids and Great Grand kids, but he hadn't decided yet. At that moment I knew that Paul was going to do exactly as Bernice had done. *Paul was disregarding a family promise made by a family member... showing*

*not one ounce of respect to Marie Mysse's final wish. Even worse... Paul knew he was going against both Bill's and Marie's wishes. Once again I found myself being treated like a piece of cellophane or in fact being totally erased from and no longer existent in the Milam-Mysse family. Paul took it upon himself to do what he wished with Uncle Bill's estate and Marie's final request concerning her nephews. Paul knew that once again I had caught him in a huge, fat ugly lie. I wasn't surprised, but once again I felt an overwhelming sense of disappointment in the overall character demonstrated by Bernice, Paul and Gary. Paul with no concept of regret and without any guilt what-so-ever associated with his actions Paul tried to convince me his actions were in accordance with Bill's Will and "Marie's wishes." **Once again Paul speaking on the behalf of someone else knowing full well his statements were nothing but lies in an attempt to cover his ass and bullshit statements.** "Furthermore", Paul stated to me, "Gary and Réene agreed with his thinking!". **Well of course Gary and Réene would agree with***

***Paul's statements... the snow ball just kept on rolling down the hill.***

It was several months later I guess Paul must have had a slight change of heart. I received a check in the mail in the amount of \$10,000.00. If Paul would have simply stated on his note which accompanied the check that this was a gift from himself to myself and my wife I would have been totally thankful for the gift. **Instead Paul spoke on Bill's behalf.** Written on the note was ***"From your Uncle Bill."*** The worst lie Paul could have ever come up with. Speaking on behalf of Bill Straw who was deceased. ***Once again speaking on the behalf of someone else and making up lies to cover up his actions... Total BULLSHIT!***

Yes, Paul gifted me \$10,000 in Uncle Bill's name. Speaking for someone else who no longer was with us... knowing the difference between right and wrong? Paul was speaking on Uncle Bill's behalf reconciling his own feelings of guilt with this check. Really! (Or was the check for the loss in the Mineral Checks, which Paul promised

he would cover if the “Milam Family” lost “**even a dollar**” in an attempted suit for more royalty money from an oil company searching for gas and oil on the old Cherry Creek properties? No family member ever contacted me to let me know what the final out come of the lawsuit was. I am sure we lost... the silence told me everything I needed to know.) The check never represented and fell far short of what Bill intended to happen and what Marie had promised and intended for her nephews to inherit. Bill Straw just misjudged Paul’s integrity as a man and as a person to keep Marie’s Final Wish. I stood my ground and confronted my father. I asked him a simple question, “*Did Sivert Jr. and Richard Myse get what Bill promised?*” Paul never said a word. Then I asked, “*Did Gary get what he was promised from Bill Straw?*” Paul finally answered by saying, “**You and your god damned big mouth. It got you in trouble with your mother and now me. You need to learn to keep your BIG God Damned mouth shut!**” “**Basin Creek Ranch is my legacy... it was never yours at all... EVER!**” I guess he thought for a moment and that’s when Paul, shouting as

loud as he could over the phone, stated that this was the “**Final Payback!**”. I was totally blown away by both statements. “The Final Payback for what?”, I asked Paul... “for being born?... for being your son? For my lecture to you to please stop your constant lying in the winter of 1971? ***To never speak on the behalf of someone else and lie about what the other person said?***” Paul never uttered a word in response and just hung up the phone.

I concluded matters with two candid letters to him. Paul would never answer the phone when I would call him about the matter of Bill’s Will. My words in written form in two letters were my only option of communication. I guess I could have driven to Bozeman, but I don’t think it would have mattered. Paul had made up his mind just as Bernice had. My two letters reflected the absolute truth. Paul’s response to my two letters were in letter form also. Paul called me a very sick individual afflicted with “***Festering Greed***” and that he was in the process of changing his Will because I was so ungrateful for everything Paul and Bernice had given me



in life. His final written comment was that I was so dastardly and evil I would contest his Last Will and Testament when I found out about it. (I never saw Paul's Last Will and Testament cementing the fact as Paul had clearly stated to me... ***we were no longer a family... Paul like Bernice had disinherited me.*** I have to wonder if we truly ever were a "Family.") I wasn't even told by my brother, Gary, when his burial would be or where. Only that his Memorial was to be held on Milam Basin Creek Ranch at an undisclosed date and for "**family members only.**" Gary made absolutely sure I was never invited to Paul's funeral or to have any reason to return to Milam Basin Creek Ranch or to Ingomar Montana. Maybe for the first time in Gary's life he was right about something, "Really there wasn't anything I wanted to go back to concerning the Cherry Creek Sheep Company (Mysse's) or the Milam Basin Creek Ranch (Milam's).

It wasn't all of Paul's past lies and words of deception that bothered me; what truly bothered me the most is that the biggest mistake I made in my life was letting people

stay in my life longer than they deserved to be. First Bernice's, then Paul's and finally Gary's actions showed me over and over again I was no longer a member of a family or a descendant of the Milam Family in the slightest sense concerning the terms son or brother. Bernice, Paul, and Gary never, ever thought they were wrong about anything, not one of them ever apologized for anything they said or did to me or anyone else on this planet. The worst thing about betrayal and greed is that they are the monsters that will eat and destroy the entire family.

I should have let go of my love of family riding back from Harlowton with Paul in 1971 or as a last straw when Hank talked to me on September 11, 2001. Unfortunately from my earliest age both Paul and Bernice did their best to control my thoughts, beliefs, emotions and behaviors in one way or another. All I ever wanted was the approval of my parents to show them my love for them. ***It was what I had been groomed to be.***



# Chapter 8

## “THE FINAL PAYBACK”



Some time passed after our exchange of letters. I returned the \$10,000.00 to Paul. Paul was paid back in FULL and could no longer claim I was the one afflicted with “Festering Greed!” I had no idea that the returning of the check would not set well with Paul’s ego, but it definitely did not set well at all with him. It was late one night. My wife and I were just going to bed when Paul made his very last phone call to me. The last time I would hear his voice on this Earth. By the tone in his voice and because of number of times he slurred his words I knew Paul had consumed a substantial quantity of alcohol (more than enough liquid courage for Paul), but that really doesn’t matter. It is what Paul said that really mattered. In a one way conversation Paul shouted over the phone, **“I was no longer a Milam, no longer a son of**

his and I was never to set foot on Milam property nor was I to talk to a real Milam ever again. That I was a liar and I would not get one god damn red cent from him or his estate after he died.” As long as I knew Paul he had a habit of screaming or shouting to get his point across after he had been caught lying or if he had been caught doing something that he knew was totally wrong. I guess he figured if he yelled loud enough it would make his bullshit actions true and I am sure he hoped that I would never talk to anyone in the family after that phone call. That way no one would ever know the truth about him, his lies and his actions. I have done my best to abide by Paul’s last living, poisonous statement to me. To be honest at that moment I felt a sense of relief that Paul didn’t want to speak to me or associate with me or my “Big Mouth” anymore. Years of abuse will do that to you. I knew Paul finally understood I knew all the sweet promises he had made to me were nothing but bitter lies and towards the end of his life I had caught him in the ugliest lie of his entire life... Paul knew that and couldn’t handle the truth.

I did nothing to provoke his wrath. When I sent back the \$10,000 dollar check, I enclosed a simple note that said “**GOD BLESS.**” Nothing which should have incited his final outburst. After listening to Paul and his final life statement to me as his son I finally understood what Paul’s brother, Donald, had meant when he told me that some day I would find out why my father’s nickname growing up was always “**TALL PAUL!**”. Indeed I did. Paul was being true to his childhood nickname even as an adult.

I guess in Paul’s mind this was ultimately the “***Final Payback***”. I could tell by the tone in his drunken voice that in this last one way conversation he had a true, sincere sense of satisfaction in his telling me these things. Perhaps, because he had completed the final chapter in what Bernice had started in her narrative concerning “***The Promise!***”. And Paul just as my mother had done... also tossed me aside like an errant piece of garbage with me wondering what had I actually done wrong to deserve the severity of their actions towards me. Did they actually base their decisions on my poor

moral character?... I rather doubt it. It definitely should never have been due to my work ethic and work history on either the Cherry Creek Ranch or the Milam Basin Creek Ranch. The real reason was because I stood up for myself and for what was promised to me? The simple fact evident to both parents was after I had gotten married neither parent could control my actions or thoughts anymore. Unfortunately you can not choose who your parents are. I feel truly sorry for anyone whether being a son or daughter who have been treated with such open contempt and lack of respect as I was. Especially when I look back, I see my family's actions towards me were not deserving... only toxic, psychopathic and narcissistic in nature. But just the same I am just as much at fault as the members of my family are for letting the events unfold around me.

The glue to any relationship or family is Trust. Trust is one of the most precious things in the world. When Trust is broken it can never be repaired. Bernice, Paul, Gary and Réene shattered this family trust multiple times throughout my life... I should have

walked away then, but I did not. I should have learned from the “Mysse Curse” and Julius’s warning about my family, but I didn’t. As Julius said, **“I was groomed to be who I was in life at an early age and it was unfortunate!”** Paul and Bernice had the goal of making themselves appear trustworthy to me as parents, when in reality they were not. They wanted to disarm me from thinking that there could be any problems with them or their parenting. Grooming was their way of creating a narrative for me to believe in. By doing that, Paul and Bernice got exactly what they wanted from me without much, if any, resistance.

I know now in my heart whether I would have gotten married or not, at some point my family would have found a way to take my part of the ranch and all the golden promises they had made to me away from me sooner or later. It was in their genetics and souls. Early on in my life I found I never wanted to hurt people or animals in any way, shape, or form. My conscience would not allow it. I always thought the best in people, especially when it came to my family. After all those

years dealing with Bernice, Paul, Réene, and Gary I have found that promises which turn into lies are like a cancer that eats at one's soul. Eventually the cancer eats all that is good and kind; leaving only heart ache and destruction behind. These life lessons were taught to me by my mother, my father, my brother and my brother's wife and those lessons will be with me forever! I will never forget and now whomever reads this will get a glimpse in what I went through in the name of the "Milam Family".

\*\*\* To Bill Seward who acted as an ambassador of friendship to the world. I owe you my most sincere gratitude and appreciation for all the advise you gave me throughout our years of friendship. You changed my life without even trying, and I don't think I could ever tell you how much you meant to me. I can't imagine what things would have been like if I hadn't met you. I should have listened closer to your fatherly warning that night about my family in the Jersey Lilly Bar and Cafe. I listened, but I did



not want to understand what you were telling me. For that I am truly sorry.

When Bill Seward, C.M. Coffee, Patty Erickson and others talked to me I should have listened and understood what was being said... instead my emotions about Family clouded everything in my life.



# Chapter 9

## **FAMILY WILL ALWAYS COME FIRST**



I did grow up to become an adult. Now a so-so old adult approaching 70 years old. I could have been gay. I could have been drafted during the Vietnam War and never come home. I could have died in Saudi Arabia. I could have died on Cherry Creek with a bullet to my back or one to my front. I could have died on Basin Creek due to a rattlesnake bite. I could have been killed by a crazed White Supremacist with a single bullet in Plains, Montana. I could have died from a line drive baseball striking me in my right eye off of first base at an Osprey baseball game. I could have died from a melanoma attached to my skull. I could have passed away in the emptiness of Rosebud and Garfield Counties like my Uncle Merton. I am so glad I had second thoughts coming home from Kalispell that “one” afternoon after the signing

Bernice's By-Pass-Trust. All different means to everyone's final end. But I am so glad none of these things happened to me. Why? Because I found true love! A Love that made both our lives worth while. A special person and family whom I could believe in completely. My Family! My soulmate who I can kiss, hug and say "I Love You" to everyday for the rest of my life. Someone whom I can hold hands with and truly believe I am the luckiest person in the world. I wouldn't change a thing in my life.

What I do want people to know is that I did turn out to be that upstanding, that knowledgeable adult who is contributing to society. An adult that loves his family more than anything in life. I am a son who would have made anyone's parents proud. Most of all I am happy. Happy with my wife and our family and the life we have made together the last 25 years. Because what happened to me, my wife and I have made a pact that we would never make any promises to our kids or to the Grandkids during our lifetime. Instead we want them to live their lives as they want and as they deserve. Our kids and

grandkids lives are theirs and theirs only to live! Michelle and my only involvement in their lives is when we ask them if they would like to share in one of our Disney Adventures, a Disney Cruise, or a Disney Park from time to time somewhere in the world. More importantly to enjoy times and life with our Grandkids and the other Grand Parents.

Ironically... no matter how loyal and good you are to one's family, that does not mean your family will treat you the same in return, especially in a toxic, narcissistic family. Julian N. Sebulsky warned me of this very fact over 50 years ago. No matter how much the Milam Family meant to me, it doesn't mean my family valued me equally. Obviously! As it turns out the ones that I loved the most turned that love against me for their own gain and to their own advantage. Exactly as Julius Sebulsky and Bill Seward had told me would happen. I absolutely could not see the future. It is so sad. I just wish Bernice, Paul, Gary and Réene could have been a part of my wife's and my happiness in life. Instead they decided to follow a path of lies, deception,

and greed all in the name of money. Not one of them understanding that the true bond that links a family is not one of blood, but of “Trust”, respect, understanding and sharing the joy in each other’s lives. After all... life is so short... we can not waste a second of it. I did waste so many years of my life following empty family promises which turned out to be no more than lies.

***Today I think twice before I allow someone into my life and I think three times before I reserve space in my heart to call them family...***



## **Luke 12:53**

*“They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”*

***This bible passage should have read:***

***“They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against son and son against mother, brother against brother, and daughter-in-law against brother-in-law.***

***I believe in destiny. It all makes sense to me now. I am truly thankful... !***

***“Natura nihil frustra facit.”***



## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

A few years after I started writing this article/book I had an accident. I was at an Osprey semi-pro baseball game. My wife and I were seated in the V.I.P. section which was located directly behind the line extended from the home plate to first base. With V.I.P. status comes food and drink. I wanted seconds on potato salad. My wife hinted that I did not. God said definitely not. But I did not listen. My appetite won the day and I obtained another healthy scoop of potato salad from the caterer. As I was finding my place at the table and attempting to sit; in a split second everything went black. Deep in my subconscious I knew I had been struck by a

baseball. I also knew my right eye was severely damaged. I am now mostly blind in my right eye. Along with the painful damage caused to my nose and the bones of my eye socket by a 100 mile per hour line drive I found this truth to be an absolute in my life: **Pain inflicted on your body heals with time. Pain inflicted on your mind never heals because the scars are always there... no matter how badly you want the scars to go away. Even being blind in one eye I see more clearly now than at any other point in my life. Family isn't whose blood you carry... Family is who you love and who loves you back unconditionally!**

**GOD BLESS:** May God bless the souls of Sivert and Janet Mysse, Julius Sebulsky, Merton Mysse, Bill and Marie (Mysse) Straw, Paul and Bernice Milam, Gary and Réene Milam... I am sure all Families are different and unique and somewhat dysfunctional. **Unfortunately for the Mysse and Milam Families they both had one thing in common - they did not know how to love. True love comes from the heart and the strength of a family lies in its loyalty to each other. No person should ever be born for the benefit of their parents exploitation.**