

Chapter Seven

Life After Al

Al's partners were very good to me. They told me the business was going to pay me for his share of the company. This was such a welcome relief for my fragile situation. I hired an accountant to handle the deal for me. We had no choice but to bear our loss and pick up the pieces and go on with our lives.

The boys seemed to be handling the loss of their father as well as could be expected. They returned to their friends and their lives. Kids do recover much easier than adults. Even though I knew this would be the outcome I was emotionally unprepared to deal with losing my husband. Even though I knew what to expect I somehow still found it unbearable once it happened.

A few months later, my friend Miriam Spitz came to see me and told me she wanted me to meet a great friend who she played golf with. I told her I wasn't ready to meet a man yet. It was much too soon but she insisted. I agreed. I thought we would just have dinner and there would be no harm in that. I was 43 years old and after going through such a terrible ordeal I thought it would be nice to have dinner with friends. It turned out Miriam and Mitchell (her husband) were not joining us for dinner. I was to meet her friend after golf on Sunday and have dinner alone with him.

Courtship with Gil

I first saw Gilbert Brooks, the man who would become my second husband, when he came into the bar after golf. He introduced himself and he immediately made me feel so comfortable. He had no knowledge of Al's Cancer and death nor did he know how recent it was.

He drove my car to his apartment on 40th Street. I waited in his living room while he changed clothes before going out to dinner. We went to a Chinese restaurant in his building and walked on Fifth Avenue. We visited a beautiful church and ended up at Maxwell's Plum for a drink. He told me he did not know Al had died so recently and said he would call me after the Jewish Holidays. Then he said, "Your Shule or mine?"

We went back to his apartment and he asked me to come up so he could get my telephone number. I was very nervous and sat behind the desk and wrote my phone number.

It was such a beautiful evening and I literally floated home. Tuesday morning, just two days later and *before* the Jewish holidays, he called. I asked him if the holidays were over so soon. We both laughed.

He asked me to have dinner with him. I was to meet him in the lobby of his building after work. I was so nervous and had forgotten what he looked like. My memory was restored as soon as he walked in.

We started dating. About a month later Gil came to our house to meet the boys for dinner. The evening went much better than I thought it might. Richard welcomed Gil so eloquently, shaking his hand and warmly saying, "I am looking forward to us being friends."

I am not sure exactly how Spencer and Bennett truly felt about it but they seemed to be OK.

When I agreed to meet Gil, I thought it would be one dinner and never see him again. That plan changed as we both found something special in each other. Some of our friends were not happy that I was dating so soon. It was really too soon for me as well. I was having nightmares over it. I once dreamed Al came back and I was having trouble choosing between them.

My friend Marilyn, who went through Al's illness with me, was very happy about Gil. She thought he was good for me. I found it difficult to understand why my friends could not see this. I had been through two years of suffering with Al and totally dedicated to his best welfare. I gave so much of myself in those years and suffered with him. My

boys suffered through it as well. I lived with his pain as if it were my own. When it was over, I felt such a need to return to life. Gil opened that door for me and the temptation was too great. I knew it was the right thing to do.

I also had a great experience meeting his children. They liked me from the beginning and encouraged our relationship. I thought he had such wonderful children. It was all coming together so well and a bit fast.

I met his Rabbi shortly after meeting his children. The Rabbi told us how it is customary in the Jewish religion for a woman to marry within 30 days after losing their husbands. This brought me great comfort, but I am sure it related to ancient times when a woman could not survive without a man. Times have changed but I did appreciate the thought.

Gil took several of us on a vacation to the Doral Country Club in Florida the winter of 1971. All three of his children came with us but only Bennett from my family. It was such a wonderful time for us all. Gil asked me to marry him in Florida and I accepted but told him we would have to wait until after Al's unveiling. That would take place in about six months.

My sister Lill and her husband, Ben, who were living in Florida, came to have dinner with us at the Doral. Lill asked me if I was bringing Gil to Florida for approval. I told her I didn't ask her opinion when I married Al and I'm not asking for her this time either. It seems nobody was good enough for me as far as Lill was concerned. Gil was no exception.

We returned to the Northeast and continued to see each other. We had a great time together. He was fun to be with and had a great sense of humor. We went to the Philharmonic, the opera, and the ballet. All these wonderful cultural events were experiences I had never been exposed to before. We went to Europe several times which I loved so much. I also loved playing golf with him. It was very unusual for men and women to play golf together in those days, but we loved it.

Family Life

We were married on June 6, 1971, in White Plains. His Rabbi married us. We had a small reception at my house in Fair Lawn. It quickly became our house as he officially moved in. He was wonderful to my children. He insisted we have a traditional family life with dinner every night in the dining room. This was quite a change for us as we always dined in the kitchen. Dinner became very important in our new family structure. We all shared our highlights and thoughts of the day. Some discussions were about us and others were from news events. Each dinner was an interesting experience and brought me closer to my children.

A short time later, Lill's husband, Ben, suffered a stroke and I went to Florida to be with him and Lill. He died a few months later while Gil and I were on one of our European trips.

Bennett was playing football in high school at that time. Gil made sure we attended every one of his games. The highlight was at his last game when we and all the parents of seniors were guests on the field. We sat very close to the action and it was another new experience for me. Bennett also made the All-County team in Bergen County his senior year at Fair Lawn and I could not have been prouder. He was actually quite good and continued playing in college at Baker University in Kansas. He graduated from college in 1976 and was the team's kicker all four years. Unfortunately, he lost four teeth his freshman year on a kick off.

After graduating from college Bennett became a sports writer for a newspaper in White Plains. After his first year, he took a vacation to California and never came back. He lived with Scott Marks, son of our friends Mimi's and Will, who he has known since they were two years old. They are still friends today and live near each other in California.

He met his wife, Josie, his first year out there. They were married in the summer of 1980 in a lovely lawn wedding at her mother's house in Los Angeles. They bought a condo in Pasadena.

A few years after our wedding, Gil's company went out of business and we decided to sell the house and move to Florida, which was where I always wanted to live. We built a house in Ft. Lauderdale and were very happy there. We went to see a friend in Wellington, about fifty miles north and were so impressed we sold our Ft. Lauderdale

house and built in Wellington. We joined the golf club and the Temple and quickly met many lovely new friends.

One Tuesday morning in the winter of 1981, Gil had a golf date and was being picked up by a friend. He put his golf clubs in the car, got into the car and passed out. Ed took him to the fire station a block away where they tried to revive him. They took him to the hospital but everything they tried was too late. He suffered a massive heart attack and never regained consciousness. On my 50th birthday, I flew up to New York to bury my second husband.

My boys said they lost their second father when Gil died. They loved him very much as I did.



Enjoying our backyard swimming pool in Tamarac, Florida, with Spencer and Gil.