

# THE ART OF LOSING IT

A MEMOIR OF  
GRIEF AND ADDICTION

ROSEMARY KEEVIL



SHE WRITES PRESS

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*For my late husband and my two beautiful  
and resilient daughters.*

**Prologue**  
**“Just Like a Pill”**  
**Pink**  
**Friday, April 12, 2002**

I n my bed on a Friday afternoon. I can't seem to sleep off this cocaine. Why did I do that? I gulp some more Bâtard-Montrachet from the lovely, large goblet on my nightstand and study the familiar green bottle. Still half full—that'll do.

I sneak out to the porch off the bedroom and scan for anybody who might notice me and my wired state. No neighbors? No gardeners?

The Camel Light I smoke offers no relief. I drink more fine wine. A shower will work—will help me sober up and wash off the stink of the smoke at the same time. A check in the mirror reflects paranoia. My God, I'm shaking; my stomach and heart are knotted together, pounding, pounding . . . maybe I'm having a heart attack.

I need sleep. It's only one thirty. I have a couple of hours. One of those little blue pills will do the trick.

Two thirty: passed out.

Three o'clock: still passed out.

Three thirty: I raise my weighted eyelids and try to focus on the

clock radio. I am suddenly wrenched out of my anesthetized state, as if stabbed with a shot of adrenaline. Oh my God! Fuck! I'm a half hour late!

Jump up. Check the mirror. Brush teeth. Grab purse, then the four daily newspapers by my door—never know when you might have idle time. Jump into Mazda RX7. Convertible hood is down. Shit! I'll be so obvious with my wild hair flying everywhere. Oh well—no time to close it now. Ram car into reverse. Get out of the garage. Hope for no rain. Check mirror. Paranoia. First gear. Move forward fast. Concentrate—very, very hard. Second gear. Third. Fourth. Highway. Concentrate. Concentrate.

Pull up to the curb by the grassy area in front of school. Still a number of kids in blue plaid uniforms—running, screaming, chattering, doing what young teen girls do. My thirteen-year-old, Dixie, spots me. Separates from her pals. Rushes over, face scrunched in confusion.

She opens the door. "Where were you?"

Newspapers spill out onto the ground. "Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha . . ." Even to me it sounds like a crazed laugh.

"Mom! Did you take an Ativan?"

"Of course not, dear."

Dixie hazards a glance at her friends. "Let's just go, Mom."

Earlier this week, she asked me to take her to Surrey on Friday after school for a sleepover at her cousin's. The dreaded drive to Surrey can be an hour and a half long in rush-hour traffic.

"Mom! Get going," Dixie pleads. "Let's just go."

But by the time we're on the Upper Levels Highway, there is something wrong with her.

"Mom, take me home. Pleeeeeease, just take me home."

I look at her. At the cars in front of us. At the cars behind us. Cars beside us. At her again. Are people honking? Her eyes are tearing; she is yelling something at me.

“Turn around!” she cries. “Don’t take the highway.”

I pull over to the side of the highway. Dixie is screaming. Maybe I should go home. I start driving, most gingerly, to the next exit and turn around.

We make it home, and I go immediately to my room and collapse on my bed. Dixie’s fifteen-year-old sister, Willow, arrives home from a friend’s and charges into my room.

“Mom, aren’t you taking me to youth group *now*?”

She shakes me out of my unconsciousness. I desperately try to register.

“Mom! I’m gonna be late. Are you taking me?”

“Where?”

“Mom. My youth group in Coquitlam. You promised!”

“Of course, dear. I’ll meet you in the car.” Oh, yes, fucking Coquitlam—as difficult to drive to as Surrey.

I drag myself into the bathroom, check the mirror . . . and see a terrified, maybe even insane person staring back at me. I hear Willow yelling to me and manage to maneuver my ravaged body down the stairs and out to the garage. Willow is just getting in the car when I get there. She is putting the family dog, fluffy little Angel, onto her lap.

I choose the Lions Gate Bridge and Barnet Highway route—far less intimidating than the Upper Levels. Somehow I make it to the Coquitlam rec center, where the youth group meets.

“Which driveway?”

“This one, Mom. Don’t you remember?”

Her friends come out to meet her. I paint a smile on my face as they look at us in the RX7 with the top down and Angel panting away, excited to see everyone.

“Nice car,” her buddy says.

“Yeah, it was my dad’s.”

“It’s awesome.”

“Nice dog.”

“When shall I pick you up?” I ask, anxious to get home and back to bed.

“I’ll call you later,” she says. “I can’t take Angel into the rec center. But remember to bring her back when you pick me up.”

As I am driving home, I notice that Burrard Inlet and the mountains are on my left.

If the mountains are on my left, I must be going east. But we live west of Coquitlam, so I must be going the wrong way. Street signs? Crossroad? Where the fuck am I? I need to check the map.

I pull into a gas station parking lot, and Angel immediately jumps out of the car. She maybe little, about twenty-five pounds, but she sure can move. Holy shit! I left her window down. She’s bolting behind the building. Oh my fucking God. I’m going to lose Angel.

“Angel. Angel. *Angel!*” I scramble out of the car and chase after her. As she runs behind the back of the station, some twenty yards away, I am terrified I will never see her again. As I round the corner, I see her about to go around the next corner. But there’s a person coming my way. A middle-aged woman with flowing clothes.

“Grab that dog, *please!*” I yell to her. “She’s the family dog. If I lose her, my kids’ll die!”

As Angel is about to run by her, the woman puts her cloth bag down, as if in slow motion, reaches out with both hands, grabs Angel, and picks her up. I cannot see the woman’s face, as the entire scene is silhouetted by the late-afternoon sun behind them.

“Oh my God. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.” I run up to the woman, squinting, and take Angel.

“You’re most welcome. He’s a cute little thing, isn’t he? What kind is it?”

“She’s a Shih Tzu Chin,” I say, short of breath. “She likes to take

off. I almost had a heart attack. Thank you soooooo much.” The sun shines directly in my eyes, like one of those brilliant lightbulbs used in dramatic interrogations and torture scenes in the movies. I am able to position myself so my face is in her shadow. Still, she can see me better than I can see her. I pray she does not detect how out of it I must be. She could report me to the police.

Back in the car, I leash Angel to the seat belt, then ensure the window is up all the way and the child lock is on. I am able to get my bearings from my map and go in the correct direction with one thing in mind: bed.

When I walk into the house, Melba is there. Thank God for Melba, our intelligent, grounded, patient, and invaluable Filipino nanny. Oh, and loyal, too. She is willing to work anytime. My last job entailed screwy hours. I worked for a radio station hosting *The Rosemary Keevil Show* (original, I know). When I started, the show aired live at five in the morning. Then it shifted to nine at night, going until midnight. Somehow I managed not to drink or use before going on air, but that meant I had a lot of drinking catch-up to do when I got home after midnight. Then the radio station changed its format, and my show was canceled.

“What’s happening, Rosemary?” Melba asks in her strong Filipino accent. “I thought you were taking Dixie to Surrey. *I* took her. Is everything all right?”

“Melba, I don’t feel well. I’m going to lie down. When Willow calls, will you please pick her up? Oh, and take Angel with you, please. Don’t forget.” The least I can do is remember to tell Melba to take the dog for Willow. “Thank you,” I say, before fleeing to my bedroom. “What would I do without you, Melba?”



# 1

## “It’s a Wonderful Life”

Louis Armstrong

Monday, December 24, 1990

“**Y**ou do this one, Dixie.”  
“How, Daddy?”

“Well, you take the spatula and get gobs of whipped cream on the chocolate wafer; then you put it on the other chocolate wafer so they stick together. The whipped cream is the glue. . . . Very good, just like that.”

My husband, Barry, and two-year-old Dixie are at the table by the small kitchen in our Whistler condo. We drove up from our home in West Vancouver for Christmas after an early dinner and arrived an hour ago. I busied the little ones as Barry hauled the stuff—Christmas presents, the turkey and makings for dinner, the suitcases—in from the car. He dumped most of it in the narrow hallway by the front door for me to dismantle and put away. Now he’s moved on to kids’ play.

“Yes, that’s right, Dixie. Now another one,” Barry continues to coach her in the intricacies of making a *bûche de Noël*, our traditional Christmas dessert. “Nooooooo . . . not like that, Dixie,” Barry

warns her, as she gobs some whipped cream onto his balding head. He dabs a bit of the cream on her nose. She squeals and grabs the spoon in a motion that looks distinctly like she's got it in for Daddy.

"Oh, man, you guys. *No*. Don't do it! This could get really messy," I say with a grin as I stop abruptly en route into the kitchen, wanting to witness, but not encourage, the shenanigans.

"That's enough, Dixie," Barry says gently, pressing down on her miniature forearm with his strong male hand to stop the spoon midair.

"I wanna help." Four-year-old Willow marches over to the table.

"Okay, Willow, sit here. Dixie's losing interest anyway."

"No, I wanna do boosh," Dixie says.

"Now, now, Dixie, here." I guide her down from the table to the array of plastic animals decorating the floor by the fire.

Thank goodness for the short attention span of two-year-olds. She plunks herself down and grabs the donkeys. "Hee-haw, hee-haw."

Barry and Willow finish the *bûche de Noël*, and I put it in the fridge so the wafers will soften overnight.

I take the girls upstairs for their nightly bath and then call on Barry to help tuck them in. He has an easier time than I do settling Dixie. She loves her bedtime routine with Daddy, who seems to magically make her teddies—Joey and Bloomy and Fluffy and Bongo—come alive and mesmerize her into submission.

Because it's Christmas Eve, it takes longer than normal to calm the girls; they require at least one extra bedtime story each. We savor the lull after the kerfuffle of the last few hours.

As we go downstairs, Barry says he has a present for *us* to go with our turkey dinner, and suggests I take a seat and close my eyes.

Some thirty seconds later, he says, "Okay. Open sesame." When I open my eyes, he has a bottle of wine resting on the inside of his forearm, just like a waiter in a fine dining restaurant.

"Wow," I say, "that looks really special."

He gingerly takes off the thin layer of brown tissue covering the label to reveal . . .

“A Château Mouton Rothschild!” I exclaim.

“It’s been in the cellar for a while. It’s a 1961, one of the best years ever. I’ve been saving it for a special occasion like Christmas.”

“I can’t wait. You think of everything.” I smile, put my hand on his cheek, look up at him, and kiss him on the lips. “Thank you, hawney.”

“Speaking of everything,” says Barry, “you’d better set it someplace safe, away from those rowdy kids. And I’d better stuff the stockings. Now, make yourself scarce while I play Santa.”