



*This book excerpt was part of a longer work depicting one woman's victory over a lifetime of abuse – first at the hands of her parents, later as the result of the relationships she chose. The story was self-published and used as a launching point for the author's full-time personal coaching business.*

## **Back to Square One**

Just one thing. Was that so much to ask? I might be a failure in everything I ever did, but I wanted just one thing to work out.

I couldn't explain why this was so important. It wouldn't save the world. It wouldn't earn me a single penny. It wouldn't mean anything to anyone else.

But for some reason, I felt everything would be okay if I just managed to make the few scraps of wood and other collected trash littering the kitchen table into a house. It probably wouldn't look much like the house I once dreamed of owning with Josh. It seemed fitting to build a symbolic representation with these broken pieces of our life - the smashed wood from the coffee table, the broken saucer that had been the last full piece of our dish set, broken DVDs.

I wanted to build a tiny house to put on my tiny porch, the apartment as close as I'll ever get to the dream now. A small success in my otherwise dismal and underachieving life.

I'd never been particularly crafty and didn't know why it was such a sudden obsession. I'd already tried three times to tie the scraps of wood together in the shape of a box, thinking it would hold things up. It wasn't working. The pieces kept collapsing in on themselves.

Just like me and Josh. We kept grasping at strings, trying to hold things up a little while longer. Every time, they'd just collapse in. Until they didn't. And Josh collapsed out, and out, and would never be coming back again.

*Back to square one*, I thought.

Josh gave up, but I couldn't do it. I didn't know any other way.

One of the fallen pieces of wood now leaned against a bell-shaped gourd and gave me an idea. The yellow squash was supposed to be part of tonight's dinner, but Josh was gone. There was no one to make dinner for anymore. It seemed to be just about the right size.

I dug through a drawer until I found the knife I wanted hidden way in the back, where Josh wouldn't find if he was in a rage. I carefully sliced away the narrow top of the gourd, leaving a rounded, bowl shape behind with an almost perfectly flat top. I cleaned out the bowl shape with precision thinking about the jack-o-lanterns I wouldn't be making with Josh's children.

It was hard, but I tried to lose myself in the task. This, at least, was something I was good at. Cooking, cutting, cleaning. That's what women were made for. At least, that's what Josh always said. Until he didn't.

I looked at the narrow cucumber shaped piece of gourd I'd cut from the top. Almost without thinking, without even having a thought as to what I intended, I cut away the tip, giving the curved column two flat edges at the top and bottom. Now it looked like a slightly bent, oversized yellow pipe. I grabbed a different knife and hollowed out the narrow stem as much as I could from both ends. I was happy to see I'd made a tube.

Now I knew what I was doing with it. I crafted a large gap at the wider end to make a fireplace.

Satisfied, I stood the squash tube inside the bowl I'd made already. I placed it near an edge, but was disappointed to find the tube wasn't quite tall enough for what I had in mind. My eyes fell on the broken saucer. One piece was just about the right size. I placed it inside the gourd-bowl and then put the gourd-tube on top of that. The half inch extra height it gained was just perfect to make the chimney peek out the top. And the saucer made the perfect little hearthstone, decorated around the outer edge with delicate pink flowers.

Of course, the tube wouldn't just stand there on its own, so I used an unbent paperclip to secure the new chimney to the wall of my miniature house.

Taking up the larger knife again, I carefully carved out a doorway across from the fireplace and cut some window openings to either side of that. Broken plastic from the DVD cases made nice windows, but I was at a loss as to how to hold it in place until I saw the toothpicks. They were a little long, but it was no problem to cut them down to the correct length creating small crosses for windowpanes.

Next, I angled two pieces of wood against each other, driving wooden skewers through them and across to hold the roof in place at the top of the gourd. I had to remove it again, though, in order to finish the interior decorating. I used a DVD fragment for a mirror embedded into one wall, a few tea light candles were somewhat bulky lamps, some scraps of torn cushion made better seating in the gourd than in the living room.

After placing the roof back on, I stared through the open doorway into the small home. I had to be honest. I was a little jealous of the doll who might live in there. Cozy and safe, comfortably warm, simple. No rules, no bills, no anger, no pain.

I wondered how long my little fantasy home would last. Carefully, I picked it up and moved it to my barren patio, a tiny concrete slab that didn't get enough sun for plants and could never hold a chair longer than a day.

The little house made things seem less lonely. It made even my broken-up apartment seem different.

I sat in the lopsided chair with the two broken legs and the torn off arm next to the window and watched the little house until all I could see was my face reflecting back at me. I wished again that I could live somewhere so happy. Like a light coming on in those little windows, it occurred to me that I made that happy little home out there.

Maybe I could do it again.

Ignoring the mess, I headed off to bed, inspired to try something different again tomorrow.