

CONNIE VLASIS



One upon a time the towers of a secluded “fairy tale” castle rose high into the sky surrounded by grand rose gardens, cascading waterfalls, flowers, artistic fountains and

fragrant lemon orchards. Its towered circular staircase, elevating to the four floors of the castle rooms, echo the romance of the ages and is a reflection of the love and long marriage of Connie and Ted Vlasis. They are the Host and Hostess of Cupid's Castle, a bed and Breakfast designed for weddings, Honeymoons, Anniversaries and those special Getaways deep in the Pauma Valley in the beautiful State of California.



Connie asked, "Is there some grand design to each and every life? Do unseen angelic forces exert control over our individual lives? These and other questions were answered in a most dramatic way over the past few years in my life."

After their three children; Tina Marie, Teddy II and Denise developed into successful adults, Connie and Ted were on their own again and looking forward to spending the rest of their lives together in tranquility. They soon learned that fate played a role in changing their destination...

They lived for many years at a mobile home park called Treasure Island in Laguna Beach, California, when a developer decided to buy the property. "The space rents skyrocketed from \$900 a month to as high as \$3,000 a month. We knew we were unable to pay the rental of the tiny space of land our mobile home sat on but we were determined not to leave without a fight."

Dressed in pirate's costumes, they flew to the developer's corporate headquarters and marched around the building in protest, drawing the attention of the media.

The Wall Street Journal did a story on the event, calling attention to corporate greed.

"We relocated to a less desirable location along the beach in another park where a winter storm caused an aqueduct to break, creating a terrible flood and our mobile home was deemed unlivable. It wasn't the perfect location to begin with. Our home was built on pilings so near the Pacific Ocean the waves at high tide would wash the windows...and the trains passing by on nearby railroad tracks also proved to be a problem. But it was the storm that flooded us out of our home and washed away the restaurant across the street."

They rented a home on the edge of Laguna Beach and life became normal...until the Laguna fires struck, burning their home and possessions to the ground. "I was beginning to think I was reliving Biblical catastrophes. I began to understand how Noah felt when the flood swept his ark on rising waters...and then the fires..."

After suffering the damages of floods and fires, Connie wondered what would happen to them next. Then she recalled advice her mother gave her years before, "When trouble strikes, try to help someone else who is worse off to get your mind off your problems."

That advice echoed in her mind one day as she heard Nicole Brown's sister, Denise, on television asking for help in establishing a foundation to help abused women. Her offer to help resulted in a meeting with the mother, Judy Brown, in her home where a large room was filled with boxes of letters, tapes, packages, newspapers and four answering machines, each filled with 150+ messages from desperate women seeking help.

"I got busy. I found volunteers and located an office where our fund raising campaign began. Then a series of miracles happened...Ted and I contacted Dr. & Mrs. Zosa regarding the fund raising project in his Los Angeles pediatrician's office. They were also the owners of the Zosa Ranch Bed & Breakfast Inn surrounded by 5,000 guava trees. The moment we walked into the office, Nena Zosa noticed my angel pin, exclaiming, 'Oh I love angels!' I removed it from my lapel and pinned it to her blouse. She thanked me and we then continued discussing the foundation for abused women."

During their conversation, Connie mentioned her nationally marketed spaghetti sauce, *Ci Bella*. That prompted Dr. Zosa to ask, with a smile, if she could do anything with guava. Mrs. Zosa asked, "What are you doing now?" Connie answered, "We are working for Vista, the domestic arm of the Peace Corp. I also have a small catering business and we make gift baskets in our spare time."



Nine months passed since that meeting and, during those months Connie and Ted were seriously considering a move to Costa Rica. Dr. & Mrs. Zosa were taking the time to decide if they wanted to sell or keep the property that included the Bed & Breakfast Inn. Nena Zosa called Connie around Christmas time 1995 to say she and Dr. Zosa were going to visit the Philippines and while they were there, she would pray for an answer.

A few days following their return from the Philippines, she called Connie to relate a strange occurrence.

"She told me she had a very special dream while she was away. She said it was the same dream she had before, when she almost died on an operating table a few years earlier. Her dream was about a choir of nine angels. This time the dream was illuminating. She said that the angels moved past her, one by one, and then the last angel passed by. Nena Zosa revealed that the angel had my face, blue eyes and blond hair."

With such a remarkable dream...and the offer to become manager of the Bed & Breakfast Inn...Connie felt there was an angelic revelation of where they should be. On February 1, 1998, Connie and Ted moved into the Zosa Gardens Bed & Breakfast Inn. Connie soon discovered that the Inn, as a business, was a total failure. "I knew I would have to add charm and beauty in color-coordinating rooms to have them be inviting. In decorating, I chose floral themes for eight of the rooms. For the ninth room, I suggested to Nena that we call it the Gardening Angel Room. She quickly agreed."



Having survived flood and fire and being directed to help the Nicole Brown Foundation where the angel pin played a significant role in the work of the foundation, Nena Zosa's dream of the nine angels with the ninth angel closely resembling Connie, she began to firmly believe in angels. "I believe in angels guiding and guarding us through the difficult paths of our journey over which we tread. It is comforting to know that we are definitely not alone."

An interesting addition to her story is that when Nena Zosa called her to suggest that Connie be her manager of

the Inn after her special dream, it was the 9th month after their initial meeting. There were 9 angels in her dream. The Inn had 9 bedrooms. Connie was born on the 9th month. The Inn address began with a 9 and the people who previously lived in the house had 9 children. Coincidence?

“Our neighbors...a group of Buddhist monks told me that 9 is a special number in the Buddhist religion meaning going forth with prosperity. There are 9 months for birth. The 9 is also the last number before it becomes a 1 and an 0 for 10, rejuvenating itself. (The significant 9 was evident when we later opened our own B&B in 1999). And also, interesting enough, a guest who stayed at the Zosa Inn 9 times became a good friend. He was a Real Estate Broker who suggested that we open our own B&B. After four years of devotion and hard work to manage the Inn into a very successful venture, we agreed that it was time we established our own Bed and Breakfast.”

He took Connie and Ted to the property...a four-story castle!

“We were amazed and yet concerned. The castle and grounds needed a lot of work and this castle was a far cry from the little trailer we once owned! He arranged the financing with no down payment, which allowed our savings to be used to renovate the property and the castle. We had no fears! We opened the doors to our own fantasy, Cupid’s Castle Bed & Breakfast Inn on the 9th day of the 9th month in 1999, with my nickname, Cupid, in the title. I felt that I could truly fly!”

Connie Vlasis is known for her catering extraordinaire and, although she has catered to many celebrities and big named Stars over the years, every guest is a Star. Ted is in Real Estate and together they form a very reliable working marriage. They pride themselves in making their guest feel very welcome, pampered, very special and comfortable. She adds with a smile... "A Sense of Fun is also vital."

She has never lost her jest for creating with food. Her culinary awards and achievements are many. Her recipe for her prima vera pasta sauce, *Ci Bella*, won first prize in the fine foods category of the National Association for the Specialty Food Trade, Inc, a gourmet worldwide contest held annually in New York.

More recently she won first prize in the Chocolate Lovers Club for her chocolate-layered cheesecake, a dessert to die for, now featured at the fine Villa Romana Trattoria Restaurant in Laguna Beach, California. Connie has been featured on the TV Food Channel, *Bon Appetit* Magazine, in *Who's Who* and is the winner of numerous local food recipe contests...and has judged a few as well.

Guest are invited to visit her kitchen as she prepares the excellent, full-course breakfast each morning and they delightfully enjoy the mid-afternoon happy hour local wines, fruits and delicious hor d'oeuvres. Dinner is served on reservation.



Connie is a local Laguna activist, parade float designer, a direct descendent of the Queen Mom and a member of the Daughters of the Revolution...and is most proud of her status as Grandmother of four "angelic" grandchildren.

"I'm truly grateful for everything that happened to me because I believe that I have learned from every adventure (I don't call them problems) in my life, each creating a new beginning. You never know where your angels will take you!"

And now...Connie and Ted are living in their castle...happily ever after...

But, that is not the end of the story...

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