

## D.J. and Gabrielle: keeping the dream alive

*We wanted to be able to do something where we could bring people together in a happy state, a space of grace, as it were*

BY ANNDEE HOCHMAN

**T**his is the house that Gabrielle gutted. This is the house that D.J. dreamed. This is the house these two women stripped and made over again with, mostly, their own four hands.

Debra Jane Novgrad had coached basketball for years. Gabrielle Duvall was a model and a computer executive. They met at a Metropolitan Community Church service in Hinsdale, Illinois. They wanted a change. They wanted to do something together.

### Profile

So they moved to Waldport, bought a house cliffhanging the ocean and measured everything in sight. They jacked up the foundation and pulled down the ceilings. They laid copper pipe, insulated the floors, nailed pine boards up all over the house and cedar wainscoting in the bathrooms, stuffed blue grout between the imported Mexican tiles, uncoiled 363 feet of ankle-thick rope and looped it over posts around the yard. They hung 42 windows, built a deck and balconies, lined the closets with cedar particle board.

When they ran out of money, they bartered with neighbors. In exchange for help with carpentry and plumbing, they baled hay and delivered calves. D.J. did some substitute teaching.

Now the bed and breakfast house speaks in both their voices. Like Gabrielle's effusive personality, the rooms overflow — with flower arrangements and blue glass vases, with photographs and books. Gabrielle does not cook breakfast but rather performs it, using cookie-cutters to make star-shaped chunks of watermelon, sprinkling toasted sesame seeds on the fruit salad. D.J. calls the hot tub repair person and makes sure everyone's cup is full of cinnamon-laced coffee.

After breakfast, the two will pick up a load of wood for the winter and stack it in the shed they built. Then they will join their guests for a game of croquet on the green, green lawn suspended over the ocean.

This is the house that D.J. dared. This is the house that Gabrielle dreamed.

D.J.: "We were just ready to do something different. I was coaching basketball at Elmhurst College [in Illinois] and it was getting stressful. I coached at the college level for about eight years. We came out here, and we were ready to live a little bit more humbly.

"This is a people business. A lot of the skills that we both had were transferable. A lot of times people don't think that their skills



Photo by Annadee Hochman

are transferable. They get these blinders on. Gabrielle definitely taught me how to dream big. It's one thing to dream, another to dream big. You know, to quit your profession and move out here and do something you totally did not know how to do."

Gabrielle: "I wasn't scared. Debra was terrified. But once we were in it over our heads, there was only one way to go. To keep going. We bought the house as is. It was a triplex. The apartments had never been vacated in 17 years. It was a matter of seeing it and saying, 'If we were to do it, how could we utilize its best potential in seeing the most of the coast that you can possibly see, and share it?'"

"I grew up having to have permission — permission to speak, permission to enter the room. Everything was kept under lock and key. To me, the joy of life is to share it and to share it freely, not with such strictures."

D.J.: "Before we even started to do anything on the house, we were dreaming and thinking. But some things changed as we went along. We were flexible that way.

"We had a very good friend help us. He used to be a contractor. He would tell us the size beams that we needed for the amount of weight that it was supporting. He would lend us some of his tools. He'd come over after work and cross out the studs we could take out and the ones we should leave so the roof didn't fall in. Little things like that.

"We would get up at six in the morning and work till midnight."

Gabrielle: "We'd say, 'It's going to rain tonight; we've got to get the windows in!'"

D.J.: "We would hire people by the hour and work with them. And then when we knew what we were doing, we would move them off to something we didn't know. Or we would tell them not to come back for two weeks until

we had finished whatever we could do. We were trying to do it on a limited budget. We have all our little eggs in one basket in this house, which is something we'd never done before."

Gabrielle: "I was a model, a large-size model. Probably the number one large-size model out of Chicago. I did the wholesale market, magazines, newspapers, fashion shows, you name it. And then I went to work for Wang Laboratories, which is a computer industry, and became district administrative manager for five branches. I began to find that it was a real kamikaze pace that I was racing through. I would get up at four o'clock in the morning and go to bed at one. I was working most of the hours of the day.

"Corporate life has a whole different ethic. In fact, it has few ethics. And that was something I just couldn't live with.

"I wanted to be able to do something where we could bring people together in a happy state, a space of grace, as it were."

D.J.: "It's a homey atmosphere. And people want to come home. They want a sense of home. Because it doesn't exist anymore. I think people are looking for that.

"In a sense, we have our own ministry here. Because there are a lot of little birds with broken wings. They're hurt, or they just need loving, a kind word, an ear, sometimes.

"We really complement each other. She's the theater, dramatic type, and I'm the down-to-earth coach. I tell people what to do. I'm the methodical, the goal-oriented one. I make my lists and cross things off."

Gabrielle: "We had a wonderful, wonderful couple come recently who had made a commitment to each other. They came with a footman and chauffeur. It was positively marvelous. They had the time of their lives. They stayed in the bridal suite. The

footman and chauffeur took the redwood room.

"We do our very best to make people realize the importance of each other."

D.J.: "We have brought people together. We do not cater exclusively to one community or the other. But people sit around a breakfast table, and everyone feels really comfortable. It's very enlightening for straight people. Everyone blends well, and everyone seems to have a really good time.

"We have had quite a few people with AIDS who have stayed with us. It's been a learning experience for me. It's opened my eyes and really taught me a lot.

"What we try to do is make the most of everybody's stay, treat them all like royalty. Because nobody gets pampered at home."

Gabrielle: "At home you don't have time to think about it. We're all in so much of a rush. Sometimes one person is the pamperer in a relationship, and the other person really needs it terribly. And when they come here, they find, 'Oh, I'm special, too.'"

D.J.: "We enjoy what we're doing. That was one thing I liked about teaching. I played for a living, and they paid me. I always said that when I didn't enjoy it anymore, it was time to do something else. And this is very enjoyable. It's tiresome, it is demanding. We're the first ones up in the morning, the last ones to go to bed, it's a 24-hour-a-day job. But it's our home. Eventually we'll probably only be open seasonally. That was one of the reasons we moved here, to slow down and have time to read and time to be together."

Gabrielle: "Many things happen in a relationship. A person becomes a certain way because he or she's never been allowed to develop in another area.

"I've learned to love more, to just keep on loving more. There's a lot of brokenness out there, broken hearts. We try hard to give them enough space for themselves.

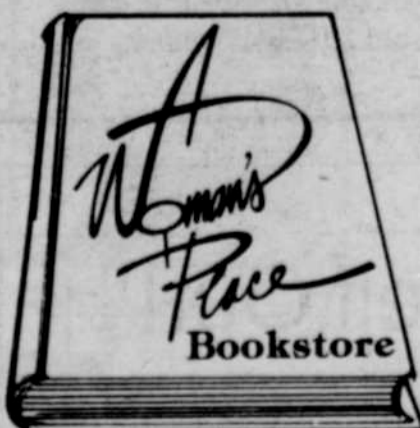
"I just don't think there's enough romance in this whole world. I love candles, I love creating the atmosphere, I love drawing the bath for everyone in the bridal suite. Teaching people to let go."

D.J.: "Doing this project has taught me that you can do anything you want to do, if you put your mind to it. Anything. We didn't know anything about plumbing or building or architecture. If you can read and you have an open mind and you're willing to listen to people, you can do anything.


"We really had to prove ourselves out here. But proving myself is something I've been doing all my life, because I was female and I was into athletics, and then with my sexuality. Then doing something that was a man's world. Building this building."

Gabrielle: "When we would lose inspiration, we would look up and look out to the ocean. It was awe-inspiring. To think of how different every wave is, when we were confronted with so many different circumstances we didn't know the answer to. And yet every one has its place. Every nail has its place. Every board has a right place. We did break away and come out here, that took our individual courage. But anybody can do it if they want to. It's keeping the magic alive." ▼

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