

# A HOUSE WITH HOLES

*One Marriage Journey  
in a Charleston Renovation*



**DENISE MAST BROADWATER**  
Foreword by Shannon Ethridge, MA

A HOUSE  
WITH  
HOLES

*One Marriage Journey  
in a Charleston Renovation*



# A HOUSE WITH HOLES

*One Marriage Journey  
in a Charleston Renovation*

DENISE MAST BROADWATER

Foreword by Shannon Ethridge, MA



MOUNTAIN VIEW PRESS

© 2019 by Denise Mast Broadwater. All rights reserved.

Published by Mountain View Press, an imprint of Redemption Press, 1730 Railroad Street, Enumclaw, WA 98022. (360) 226-3488

[www.mountainviewpress.com](http://www.mountainviewpress.com)

Mountain View Press is honored to present this title in partnership with the author. The views expressed or implied in this work are those of the author. Mountain View Press provides our imprint seal representing design excellence, creative content, and high-quality production.

Sketch of Charleston Cottage by Jessica Roux. Used with permission.

ISBN softcover: 978-1-951350-00-0

ISBN hardcover: 978-1-951350-01-7

ISBN ePub: 978-1-951350-02-4

ISBN Mobi: 978-1-951350-03-1

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2019910491



## DEDICATION

*For Greg,  
my husband and my brightest life-light.  
Your gifts are extraordinary,  
and there's no one I'd rather work alongside.  
Thanks for changing our lives  
and supporting me to change mine.*





## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Foreword . . . . .	ix
	Preface . . . . .	xv
	Acknowledgments . . . . .	xvii
ONE	A Brick for Christmas . . . . .	19
TWO	We Found Our Cottage . . . . .	29
THREE	Love Almost at First Sight . . . . .	39
FOUR	Dragged through the Mud . . . . .	55
FIVE	Opened to the Elements. . . . .	67
SIX	It Only Got Worse. . . . .	77
SEVEN	Where There's Smoke, There's Usually Fire. . . . .	93
EIGHT	Weeding the Courtyard . . . . .	107
NINE	Coincidence or Divine Providence? . . . . .	125
TEN	Murder before Breakfast. . . . .	137
ELEVEN	Our End Was Exposed. . . . .	147
TWELVE	Restored! . . . . .	161
	Afterword . . . . .	175
	Our Construction Chronicle in Pictures . . . . .	181
	Suggested Reading List . . . . .	187
	About the Author. . . . .	189
	Ordering Information . . . . .	191







## FOREWORD

When we take on a big building project, we can usually assume that it will require:

- more TIME than we allotted
- more ENERGY than we expected
- more MONEY than we had budgeted

I learned all of these truths the hard way many years ago, when we moved from the hustle and bustle of Dallas to the serene piney woods of east Texas.

We found a secluded 122 acres with a cute little log cabin overlooking a huge stocked pond. It was idyllic, except that the doctor who had previously owned this home away from home had died ten years earlier, and his family hadn't returned since. Imagine ten years of dust, cobwebs, and even a few dead mice and snakeskins, and you'll know what we first encountered! When my mother walked in, she started crying. "You've just got so much work to do here!" she bemoaned.

But the overwhelming projects didn't deter us. We saw our cabin as a diamond in the rough that just needed polishing. *A lot* of polishing.

With a family of four, we knew we'd eventually

need to add on to the 1,700-square-foot cabin to make it comfortable for the long term, but we wanted to wait until we could really do it right. We lived in it for seven years before we began the massive add-on project, which would give us a total of 4,500 square feet. Yes, we practically built a whole new house—which just happened to be right next door to the old one!

We had to pay extra attention to make sure that everything blended just right. Whatever materials we used in the new construction, such as decorative fieldstone and prairie-mutton windows, we also added to the original structure, for uniformity. And we paid master craftsmen to take chisels and chains to the new log beams to “age” them so that they looked approximately the same age as the ones on the original side of the house. I kept thinking, *We sure are paying a LOT of money to make something so new look so old!* But imagine my delight when newcomers to our home had to ask, “So which is the *old side* and which is the *new side*?”

From planning to completion, the project took a total of three years. There were a lot of unexpected twists and turns, the biggest of which was the day we were meeting with the builder to go over the budget. He presented his itemized list of material costs and labor, and we were flabbergasted at the bid! Immediately, my eyes scanned the pages, trying to identify a way to cut some major corners.

“Do we really need to spend *that* much money on the new foundation?” I asked naively. It was almost

a third of the budget! But before our builder had a chance to answer, my mind flashed back to a moment in history that I'll never forget . . .

I was baking a pineapple upside-down cake for my grandfather's birthday, and I was ready to turn it over onto a cookie sheet to let it cool. However, I could find no cookie sheets in my cupboards. It hit me that my daughter had taken them to her kindergarten classroom for a science project. I had to improvise, so the best I could come up with was a wire cooling rack, which I covered in aluminum foil. I was pretty proud of myself . . . until I got to the nursing home and realized that the cake was now "rippled" from one end to the other, like a Ruffles potato chip. Because it didn't have a firm foundation to rest upon, sections sank through the cracks of the wire rack.

I snapped back to reality. *I don't want our new house falling through any foundation cracks like that birthday cake did!* My builder confirmed my suspicion as he declared unapologetically, "Ma'am, if you're going to cut corners, I certainly *don't* recommend that it be in the foundation work!"

Fast-forward a few years later to 2009. I began developing a twelve-month online course for aspiring writers and speakers—The B.L.A.S.T. Mentorship Program (B.L.A.S.T. being an acronym for Building Leaders, Authors, Speakers & Teachers). As I laid out the overall concepts I wanted to teach my B.L.A.S.T. participants, I realized that "building" anything requires similar strategies—visionary thinking, careful planning, smart budgeting, creative processes, etc.

Therefore I used the architectural blueprint analogy throughout the materials to coach people through the process of building their own speaking and writing platforms.

So imagine my delight when I meet Denise Broadwater, a professional counselor who is looking to write her own book about building healthier relationships using the analogy of her own major home renovation! We were kindred spirits from the start, and watching Denise get traction with her vision to bring this book to life has been an absolute *joy*! I also had the privilege of coaching her through a four-day “B.L.A.S.T. Next Level” experience, where she presented her proposed book ideas to the entire group, and I watched everyone light up with great anticipation!

Denise’s heart for helping others absolutely *shines*, and her wisdom runs *deep* based on her own unique life experiences as a wife, mom, counselor, and friend. Denise understands that relationships *are* a lot like house renovations. They *do* take a lot more time, energy, and resources than we can fathom. But she also knows that cutting corners on foundational truths and principles is incredibly detrimental in the long run and that there is no greater, more rewarding investment than to build something absolutely beautiful *together*.

So if you’re looking for a great read that will help you develop a realistic vision for a happier, healthier home environment—not just because of the lovely exterior renovations but because of the rich relationships contained therein—then you’ve picked up the right book! May you be inspired to cherish the opportu-

nities you have to create something beautiful in your own home, life, marriage, and family!

— Shannon Ethridge, MA

Life/relationship coach, speaker, and author of twenty-two books, including the million-copy best-selling *Every Woman's Battle* series.





*AS I STOOD AT THE stove, I glimpsed movement out of the corner of my eye. I looked over my shoulder and saw the gray-brown bushy tail of a raccoon moving slowly away through the plastic curtain into the construction area.*

*I shut off the stove, stuck the soup pot into the warm oven, and slammed the door behind me as I fled into the front room. My first impulse was to fire off an angry text to Greg, but I knew I'd regret what I would write in my current emotional state.*

*Instead, I trembled on the bed with a blanket over me. The longer I waited, the more I felt sorry for myself. How much of this was I supposed to stand?*









## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to Donna Brannon, a bestie who pushed me to write my story before I believed I could, who puts me to the test, and I love her for it.

My editor, Lana McAra, who smoothed out all the rough edges. Beyond the love of writing, we share DNA. Thanks for all you did to make my story shine in this debut book.

Dr. Larry Wagner, professor of marriage and family therapy at Columbia International University whose training in marriage theory is foundational to my counseling. While it has altered slightly during my years of treatment, I still value his perspective and use his practical helps.

Connie Gonzalez, Ruthie Cooper, Jill Broadwater, Axa Carnes and Marci Cairns, my personal cheerleaders. Thanks for allowing me to bounce ideas off you, for reading and proofing, and most of all, for giving of your time to this project.

BLASTNEXT 2018 ladies: Alicea Davis, Dena Johnson Martin, Loyla Louvis, Laura White, Phylis Mantelli, Carol Larson, Tamara Denis-Lewis, and Sandra Lovelace—all beautiful, impactful women walking this life with me. You get it in ways few others do. And Shannon Ethridge, who brought us together in the first place.

Thanks to Mick Silva, my writing coach, who was the first to believe in the potential of my scribbles.

And thanks to my mother, Betty Laughter, who may never know her true part in this work and the works to come.

## Chapter 1



### A BRICK FOR CHRISTMAS

LINED UP LIKE A BASTION along the bay, Charleston's parade of historic homes dates back to the 1600s—some of the first structures built in this country. Preserving this rich past has a cult following here. Locals cry out if scavengers collect relics from their sacred lands. They resent poachers. *Do not disturb* is the local mantra, touted on signs, bumper stickers, and badges with slogans like, "Gut fish, not houses." Local ordinances within the hallowed peninsula forbid a house to be torn down. Houses are to be preserved and respectfully renovated.

Charleston culture pushes to save its history and keep it for the enjoyment of all. On a recent carriage tour, our docent pointed out a street that looks just as it did in the 1700s, so much so that movie makers often film on that street. The city draws millions of visitors each year, people who long for simpler, more primitive times.

This is the environment we chose for our renovation. As glamorous as I envisioned owning a part of

this history would be, reality hit when more primitive times showed up as renovation dust, cooking meals on a hot plate, and icy drafts.

Our second winter in Charleston began with cold seeping in by mid-December. Although winter in Charleston is mild compared to most of the country, our blood ran thin because we were used to the warmer climate. As the damp cold crept into the house, my bones felt saturated with it. I was cold through and through.

Greg set the vent-free heater in front of the fireplace. The unit was rated for more than our small area, yet the heat pooled in the center of the room, and the corners stayed frigid. Greg did some research and spent a Saturday morning sealing the windows with a plastic film to keep out the drafts, but the lack of insulation in the walls made plugging the holes around the doors and windows futile. We were in a losing battle until our walls were redone.

I wonder how the poor dears from years past lived in this house under these conditions. It takes me back to tent camping with friends and family in the Appalachian Mountains, where we huddled near a central campfire before climbing into our cold tents for the night, praying our zero-rated sleeping bags would use our body heat to warm us. Warm clothing, wool socks, and lots of hot chocolate were our only recourse. I go back to these defenses, putting on my warmest PJ's, hiding under a down comforter, and reading my latest obsession.

Greg could not do the mechanical part of this

project himself because he didn't have a license. Finding a company Greg could trust to do the job to his specifications slowed everything down. So, there we were, coming up on Christmas with little more than a gas heater. I voiced my complaints, but I was forced to accept my discomfort as part of living in a project while working on it.

Living through these stages of renovation broke me down in some ways. What I thought I needed to make my life work became peripheral. A life unencumbered was freedom. I was still in the process of releasing things. From time to time, the pressure built in me, and Greg faced the brunt of my frustration. That afternoon, after coming in from a long week, I began dinner on my hot plate in our front room retreat. As Greg came onto the piazza, I started in with my attitude.

"I am done. I need central heat, a washer, dryer, and a floor that can be mopped. The dust is constant." When he didn't respond, my voice rose. "Are you listening?"

"I don't like it when you say *done*, Denise. I know it's taking forever. Are you done with me? Do I get lumped in with the house?"

"Well . . . I guess I'll keep you." I managed an upside-down smile. "I guess I am saying just ditch the house because I would want you to come with me."

"And just where would we go? This is our only home and friends would tire of us staying over." Charleston's rent district was so expensive that managing it along with costly renovations was just out of the question.

We both laughed and tried to come to terms with where we stood. It wasn't even half complete, and the worst may be ahead of us. But the things left are amenities we took for granted in the past, like heat.

This no-closet, dust-filled cottage on the upper West Side of Charleston pinged me from time to time, but I consoled myself knowing life was short and each day a gift. I rested in the belief that this project would one day end. My only choice was to struggle through.

This was the second Christmas season without a family celebration at our house. Before, most years I loved to host a number of Christmas parties and family gatherings. Christmas was my favorite time to show love and appreciation for people who blessed us through the year. My gift of hospitality was on hold indefinitely. I missed that part of myself.

My adult children arranged to have our gathering at our eldest son's home, making the holidays manageable. I tried to be content with being together as a family and not give into the longing to have my children sit at my table for Christmas dinner. This time of year confirmed more and more that our family home was no more.

After dinner, I generally retired to the front room where I would sit with my laptop and pour out written words, scan social media, and catch up on emails. But this particular evening, about a week before leaving for the holidays, I felt too cold to type. Instead I put on my thickest pajamas and snuggled in my bed. Greg was stretched out on the sectional

in the living room, reading with a TV show going for background noise.

Suddenly, a blast shook the side of the house. Glass shattered, and I heard a heavy thud. In my dreamlike state, I assumed a gunshot tore through the house.

I bolted upright. “Greg! Are you OK?” I desperately prayed that Greg wasn’t bleeding. My active imagination anticipated a horror scene outside my bedroom door.

Greg called back. “I am good. Don’t come in here, Denise. Glass is everywhere!”

I glided to the door with one catlike movement, afraid to look, afraid of what I would see. Slowly opening the door of our makeshift wall, I peeked out.

Greg was down on all fours. A brick lay inside the original mullioned window, and glass particles spread throughout the room. Greg inspected the floor for any evidence of what might have happened.

“That brick came through the window?” I pointed to the broken pane next to the front door.

Still looking at the floor, Greg said, “I was sound asleep on the sectional sofa when it happened.” He looked up at me. “Thank God, Denise, you weren’t sitting there because it could have hit you in the head.”

My heart raced up to another level. My breath caught in my throat. I trembled as I had a flashback from middle school when a group of bullies slapped me around for not setting up a volleyball spike.

Greg and I were being targeted. It was the only explanation.

As I came to my senses to peruse the damage,



I tried to console myself by looking at the bright side—this old six-paned window was soon to be replaced. One small section had shattered. Other than that, little else was hurt.

I grabbed my phone off the nightstand. “I am calling the police to report this.”

Greg doesn’t like confrontation or dealing with the police. He walked into the other room with little more than, “OK.” He knew any attempt to keep me from calling was a losing battle.

In seconds, the operator was on the line. “911. What is your emergency?”

“We had a brick thrown through our porch window about five minutes ago.”

“I am so sorry for your trouble this evening, ma’am. Is anyone hurt? Do you need me to dispatch EMS?”

“No. Fortunately no one was in the path of the brick, but we need someone to investigate and advise us on how to proceed. I’m scared the person may be outside.”

“Stay inside your house until the officers arrive. They are in route now and should be there shortly. Please stay on the line with me until they arrive.”

I awkwardly held the phone to my ear. Tears formed in my eyes. Sometimes I had to wonder if our dedication to this project was worth what we faced in the two years since we moved here. Was this brick a warning, telling us to get out of the neighborhood? Were we invading a place where we were not wanted? But our neighbors were so friendly. Nothing made sense.

I looked for Greg to get his thoughts on the situation. He was in the back of the house getting a broom and dustpan to finish cleaning up the glass.

“Who would do such a thing? This makes me so uneasy.”

“Let’s talk to the police when they come. They are more aware of the calls and this type of behavior in the area than we are. Maybe they’ll step up patrols and give us advice.”

The policeman arrived and surveyed the damage. Short and wide with his blond hair in a marine cut, he shined his giant flashlight under our porch and examined the backyard.

In a moment, he came to our door. “I am sure this is a bit unnerving for you folks tonight,” he said, all business.

Greg said, “This has gone to the point that my wife thought we might need things checked on out here.”

Me: Damsel in Distress. Greg: Macho Man who was only calming the wife.

After examining the brick on the living room floor, the policeman told us it came from our own courtyard.

“Mr. Broadwater,” he stared down at his pad, writing notes as he spoke, “do you have any form of protection in your house should someone try to force their way inside to steal or harm you or your wife?”

Greg and I looked at each other, shocked. We had forgotten the Stand Your Ground protections afforded here in the South. We decided to not answer that question.

“I work these streets,” he went on, “and I don’t think it is out of hate or malice. Maybe it’s some teens who are out of school on Christmas break, and they were horsing around out here. Just to be safe, having a form of protection would be wise.” He tore off a copy of the page and handed it to Greg. “I can write you a report for your homeowners insurance, if you need it.”

“No need, Officer,” Greg said, folding the paper. “I’m going to have that glass pane fixed in just a few minutes. I won’t need to file a claim. Thank you for coming out to check on us.”

Before he left, the policeman pointed out the loose bricks under the edge of our piazza. “Get rid of these bricks and keep your gate closed.” The officer kicked at the bricks stacked next to our porch step. “I know it is not a total fix for this mischief, but we don’t want to provide their ammunition, if you know what I mean.”

“I’ll get those right away,” Greg respectfully responded.

“Here’s my card; call me anytime.”

A moment later, the blue flashing lights pulsating through our living room disappeared, and he was gone.

Greg took a few minutes to pick up the bricks, future pavers for our back patio, and place them inside the back fence. Then he went to work on the pane. A lifetime before, he’d worked for a window manufacturer, repairing and reglazing windows. In less than fifteen minutes, the broken pane was as good as new,

taken from a spare window he had saved. It looked untouched.

While he took care of that, I made coffee for both of us. We sat in our chairs, warming by the gas stove, trying to settle our rattled nerves.

I asked, “Do you think the brick is a message that we don’t belong here? Everyone has been so good to us, but it makes me wonder.”

Greg rubbed his forehead, every crease showing his exhaustion. “I think it’s some teenager put up to a dare. The police officer thought so too.” He drained his mug. “It’s over and done. I’m tired. Let’s try to get some sleep if we can.” Suddenly, he grinned. “One funny thing is if they come back, they can’t even show their buddies what they did.”

Returning our mugs to the sink, I chuckled to think of the vandals returning to see their handiwork, but the glass now looking as if it never happened. Where is the fun in vandalizing if you can’t show it to your friends?

“I didn’t want to give them the satisfaction of knowing they got one over on us,” Greg said as we trudged toward the bedroom.

I pulled down the comforter and slid in next to him, my hero.

This disruption wasn’t going to complicate things. Greg and I were going to finish this restoration if it killed us. But after that night, we began to wonder if it might.

