

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution Sunday, Nov. 2, 2014

E | LIVING & ARTS

Ambitious drive aims to save Finster’s folk church, E3

News: livingnews@ajc.com | Delivery: ajc.com/customercare or 404-522-4141

ONSTAGE



Atlanta Opera opens its season Saturday with “Madama Butterfly.” CONTRIBUTED BY RAY BOC

Opera sets out on new path

‘Madama Butterfly’ first real glimpse of artistic director’s vision.

By Andrew Alexander
For the AJC

The Atlanta Opera got a new general and artistic director last year, but it’s only this year that local opera audiences will really get to know him.

Tomer Zvulun, who’s built an impressive career staging operas around the world, stepped into the position in April 2013. But because opera companies map out their show schedules far in advance, the Saturday season opener of “Madama Butterfly” is the first opportunity for opera patrons to see his artistic vision flower in a full season of productions.

The new production is indicative of Zvulun’s goal for the opera to create and own more original productions rather than rent sets and costumes from other companies.

For Giacomo Puccini’s tragic opera about a Japanese geisha who falls in love with an American naval officer, Zvulun brought in a creative team he calls “my favorite designers.” Set designer Erhard Rom

Opera continued on E11

myAJC

Dig deeper to learn more about Tomer Zvulun and how he plans to share his enthusiasm for opera at myAJC.com/sundayliving

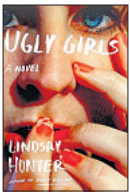
What’s inside

Uncle Sam’s table

See how the government has influenced what we eat at a new exhibit at the CDC Museum. E7

Stuck in a rut

Beauty, dignity peek through in novel about teens trapped by stifling poverty. E10



PJ Personal Journeys

An award-winning feature that spotlights the lives of extraordinary individuals and the stories that define our region and connect our community.



Since she was released from jail in 2010, Linda Case enjoys simple pleasures such as sitting on her back porch in Buford breathing what she calls “free air.” After being jailed for six months, she served another eight months of home confinement. HYOSUB SHIN / HSHIN@AJC.COM

The fugitive’s sister

Why did Linda Case give up her freedom to help a sister who treated her so badly?

By Suzanne Van Atten
svanatten@ajc.com

Linda Case admits she did one thing wrong; others say she did two.

Either way, at age 66, the petite grandmother who never had so much as a speeding ticket wound up in jail for her connection to a \$1.9 billion federal fraud case in which it appears she never received a penny.

Her younger sister, Rebecca (Becky) Parrett, benefited handsomely from the criminal bookkeeping at National Century Financial Enterprises Inc. (NCFE), a company she co-founded and served as vice-chairman and treasurer.

In 2008, Becky was convicted of nine counts of fraud, but she vanished before she could be sentenced. While in hiding, she secretly communicated with her sister. That’s when Linda entered a moral and legal gray area.

Linda had every right to refuse Becky’s calls and emails. She had just been found guilty for one of the largest privately held corporate fraud cases in the country. And by several accounts, she treated Linda miserably. The sisters had been estranged for years over an incident the family calls “the worst Christmas ever.” But Becky needed help, and she convinced Linda she was the only one who could prove her innocence.

Who’s to say what makes



The Mayes sisters, 3-year-old Rebecca Sue (left) and 8-year-old Linda Lou, in Henderson, W.Va., in 1951. CONTRIBUTED

someone commit an act she knows is wrong? The person who does the deed is the only one who can truly understand the motivation. Even then the real reason may be buried beneath the little white lies people tell themselves.

And who but two sisters can fathom the intricacies of the tie that binds them – especially one rife with greed and jealousy.

Still the question lingers:

Why did Linda do what she did?

Rocky family life

Linda Lou Mayes’ first childhood memory was of her father lifting her up to peer through the clinic window to see her newborn sister, Becky Sue. The year was 1948. Five

Continued on E4

HOW WE GOT THE STORY

As the editor of Personal Journeys, I am reminded of two things when I write one myself. One, it takes a lot of work to produce a story this complex and deeply reported. This one required six trips to Buford; 20 hours transcribing interviews; multiple phone calls to California, Arizona and Ohio; two memoir manuscripts to read, as well as dozens of newspaper reports and a couple background checks; and one unsuccessful attempt to talk to Linda’s sister, Becky. For more than a month, my waking thoughts have been consumed with Linda Case and her story.

The second thing is just how much the people behind these stories give of their time, their patience and their experiences to make Personal Journeys come alive on the page. This story first came to my attention via an email from Linda herself. Bringing her to tears with my nosy questions was my least favorite part of the process. But she never let that stop her from sharing the more painful parts of her story, and for that I am grateful. Speaking of Linda’s story, if you want to know more, go to www.thefugitivesister.com.

Suzanne Van Atten
Personal Journeys editor
personaljourneys@ajc.com

Next week: ‘I am not a dog person’ is the last thing he said before he let Lucy into his heart.

FINISH YOUR HOLIDAY SHOPPING EARLY

JUST ANNOUNCED!

RHYTHM AND BLUE

BLUE MAN GROUP

MOTOWN THE MUSICAL

PIPPIN

STILL AVAILABLE!

FOR ALL GENERATIONS

Disney NEWSIES

BLUE MAN GROUP

WICKED

FIFTH THIRD BANK

BROADWAY ATLANTA

3-SHOW PACKAGES START AT \$100

BroadwayInAtlanta.com • 800.278.4447 (M-F, 9AM-5PM)

PERSONAL JOURNEYS

The fugitive’s sister

Linda Case always had a rocky relationship with her sibling, so why did she break the law for her?

continued from E1

years separated the sisters, and for Linda it was as though a baby doll had come to life.

That’s one of just a handful of happy moments Linda recalls from her childhood in Henderson, W. Va., a speck of a town near the Ohio border. The memories that loom largest are her father’s drunken rages when he’d rip their house apart and threaten to kill their mother.

By the time Linda was a teenager, Becky had lost her baby-doll appeal. She often taunted her big sister – pulling pranks, yanking hair and tattling. But at the end of the day, Becky would beg her mother to make Linda forgive her for all her annoyances. To keep peace and avoid the sting of a belt strap, Linda always acquiesced.

Linda was 16 when she became pregnant and dropped out of high school.

Now 71 and living in the bright, roomy in-law suite of her daughter’s home in Buford, she fiddles with a tissue and looks down at her lap as she recalls those rocky days.

“All I wanted was to get married and get out of there,” she says. And so she did. By the time their son was 1, the newlyweds had already split up. “He was worldly and didn’t want to be tied down. I didn’t know how to be a mom,” she says softly.

A second more stable marriage produced two daughters, Sheri and Trisha.

Then along came husband No. 3, “Mr. Personality,” as Linda calls him, an outgoing insurance salesman. He pursued Linda relentlessly and she succumbed.

“You don’t pick who you fall crazy in love with,” Linda says with a sigh. “We were both so crazy.”

Just four months in, Linda was heartbroken to discover she had married a man like her father, only worse. She stayed with him eight years until she couldn’t take his drunken rages any longer.

One good thing came out of their marriage – Linda’s husband instilled in her a desire for education and a fierce loyalty for Ohio State University.

Linda left Anniston, Ala., where her husband was in the Army at Fort McClellan, and moved to Columbus, Ohio, where her mother, Nellie, and siblings now lived. Between working full time as a secretary and raising her children, she attended school on nights and weekends. It took seven years, but she finally earned a bachelor’s degree in accounting from Ohio State and bought a small tax preparation business.

She also forged a new relationship with Becky, which led to some of the happiest times of her life.

Living the high life

Seated on the wing of a private plane, Becky Parrett flashes a fluorescent smile on the cover of the July 1997 issue of Today’s Arizona Woman magazine. Wearing a conservative navy blue skirt suit and a tightly coiffed blond bob, she radiates bubbly energy.

The cover story chronicles her rise from Medicare clerk

As Becky became more successful, the fun times grew more lavish. One time Linda was whisked away for a weekend in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., as a reward for beating her addiction to Nicorette gum.



Linda looks through a folder of old family photos at her apartment in the basement of daughter Trisha Cardillo’s home in Buford. Linda shares her home with five cats and Sonny Boy, a 100-pound bullmastiff-Labrador mix. Linda has written a memoir about the events that landed her in jail. Now she’s working on a prequel. HYOSUB SHIN / HSHIN@AJC.COM



A portrait of Linda taken in the the '80s. CONTRIBUTED

to owner of a medical billing and collections company to co-founder of a medical finance company. NCFE provided loans to hospitals and other health care providers using their accounts receivables as collateral. Based in Columbus, the company claimed \$200 million in annual revenue that year and had offices in Arizona, Florida and North Carolina.

Described as fun and lively, Becky was always up for a good time. When Linda’s kids were little, Becky would take them to Red Lobster for dinner or outings to Kings Island amusement park. The extended family would gather at her house for holidays and Super Bowl parties.

And as Becky became more successful, the fun times grew more lavish. One time Linda was whisked away for a weekend in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., as a reward for beating her addiction to Nicorette gum. When Linda turned 50, Becky flew the whole family to Las Vegas for a surprise party.

“We had a lot of fun in the ’80s,” Linda says.

The two sisters had much in common. Both were pretty and fit. They attracted plenty of beaus and wed nine times between them, but their marriages never lasted. Both were successful career women and moms. And neither one ever met a stray dog or cat they wouldn’t rescue.

But an unspoken rivalry festered beneath the surface.

It was a family joke, says Linda, that if she expressed interest in something, Becky would immediately obtain it for herself. When Linda got a cat with two different colored eyes, so did Becky. When Linda got a baby grand piano, so did Becky. When Linda took ballroom dancing lessons, so did Becky – same for golf and tennis.

Every year after tax season, Linda would visit her son and his family in Long Beach, Calif. She fell in love with the West Coast and decided to sell her business and move there in the mid-’90s. Daughter Sheri followed, getting an apartment nearby.

Around that same time,



Linda (center) is shown with her children, (from left) Sheri Kent, Trisha Cardillo and Michael Blakeman in 1983. CONTRIBUTED



Linda (center) is shown with her late brother, Dan Mayes, and sister Rebecca (Becky) Parrett at Linda’s home in Columbus, Ohio, in 1987. CONTRIBUTED

Becky began to change, say Linda and her daughters. It was as though they’d become a burden to her, especially after she married NCFE co-founder Donald Ayers, who Linda says looked down on his wife’s West Virginia roots. Becky would still fund family holidays and outings, but she often skipped the events herself. And if she was there, she expected to have complete control over the proceedings.

“He who has the money makes the rules, as far as Becky was concerned,” says Linda. “And if you didn’t do what she wanted, well ...”

Holiday reunion disaster

One October day in 1998, Linda arrived at Becky’s \$2

million home in Desert Mountain, a luxury golf community in Scottsdale, Ariz., sick with grief. Her son had died of a drug overdose, and Becky had thrown her a lifeline.

You won’t have to work. You can grieve and just stay here for a while, Becky had said.

When Linda arrived, she was surprised to discover she wasn’t staying in one of the unoccupied guest rooms but in the servant’s quarters, a single room containing a bed and kitchenette, accessible through the garage, where a small seating area was under construction.

From the time Linda arrived, she rarely saw Becky, who traveled often for work and led an active social life that didn’t include Linda.

“I didn’t have time to grieve

because she was gone all the time,” says Linda. “I ended up managing all the things that were going on in the house – the remodeling, taking care of the animals and just managing her affairs.”

At least she had Sheri, who as usual followed in her mother’s wake and was living in an apartment nearby.

When Christmas approached, Becky offered to fly Linda’s family in for the holidays. When daughter Trisha arrived, she was livid to discover her mother had been consigned to a room off the garage.

“It was indented servitude,” says Trisha, her voice rising in anger.

Tensions ran high that holiday week. Becky was rarely home, even missing the professional photo shoot Sheri had arranged for a family portrait. When Becky announced she’d planned a lavish dinner party at a hotel on New Year’s Eve and expected everyone to attend, Trisha balked. She had two small children, one of whom was only 6 months old, and she wasn’t going to leave them with a babysitter she didn’t know. Trisha, her husband and Sheri stayed home with the children that night.

Becky was furious. The next morning she ordered Trisha and her family off her property – “all because I didn’t go to her \$100-a-plate dinner,” Trisha says.

It crushed Linda to see her children treated so badly. That’s when she and Sheri decided to leave Arizona and follow Trisha to Buford.

Linda didn’t speak to Becky for four years.

Another family death

Dan Mayes, Linda and Becky’s older brother, became gravely ill with leukemia and cellulitis in 2002. He knew he didn’t have long to live, but he wanted to make a final gesture he hoped would heal his family. His greatest concern was the happiness and well-being of their aging mother, who looked up to her children, especially Becky, who was so financially successful and had promised to provide for her in her old age.

Just hours before he died, Dan called Linda from his hospital bed in Columbus, Ohio. She could hear him crying.

Remember when we were growing up? Every night, before Becky could go to sleep, Mom would make us forgive her for all the mean things she’d done to us all day? he said, his voice thick with emotion. *I want you to promise me that you’ll forgive her one more time.*

Early the next morning, Linda’s phone rang. It was Becky calling from Columbus to tell her their brother had died.

I owe you an apology, Linda, for my actions after your son

PERSONAL JOURNEYS

continued from E4

died, Becky said.

Linda assumed Dan had prompted Becky's apology, but she didn't care. She believed in the power of positive thinking and tried not to dwell on the past. She accepted Becky's apology. *Let's not talk about that anymore*, she said.

Becky had to return to Arizona to handle some pressing business, and she asked Linda to come to Columbus as soon as possible. She agreed to pay for Dan's funeral if Linda would make the arrangements. Just like that, the sisters were back to their old patterns.

Linda drove to Columbus the next day and found her grieving mother alone. Becky had already left. According to their mother, something was "terribly wrong" with Becky's business, and she was meeting with attorneys.

Three days after Dan was buried, the FBI raided the NCFE offices in Ohio and seized computer records after bondholders raised questions about a suspected \$500 million shortfall in reserve funds.

A high-profile trial

For the next six years, the family's lives were shrouded in uncertainty as the situation with Becky and NCFE dragged on.

Distraught with grief over the death of her son and frantic about Becky's future — as well as her own — their mother Nellie slipped into a deep depression and quit eating. Linda eventually moved back to Columbus and bought a home nearby so she could keep a close watch on her mother.

In Atlanta, Sheri met a Mexican national and fell in love. They married and ultimately moved to California. For the first time, mother and daughter put some distance between themselves.

And all the while, Becky blew in and out of town, asserting her innocence and meeting with attorneys in preparation for charges she knew were coming. Having become increasingly religious, she began making mission trips to Nicaragua and Costa Rica.

In May 2006, Becky — along with six other NCFE executives — was indicted. She faced 36 charges of conspiracy, money laundering and securities, mail and wire fraud. The indictment accused her of helping move funds in and out of accounts and preparing false reports. She began to spend more time in Ohio, preparing her case. Occasionally she stayed at Linda's house, where she slept with a gun under her pillow because of death threats, she said.

As the trial loomed, newspapers were filled every day with Becky's photo and stories about the case. Her mother grew increasingly distressed and agitated over the public scandal, and her mental acuity began to diminish.

Becky asked to store some boxes and furniture at Linda's house. Eventually the items filled Linda's garage, top to bottom. She also asked Linda to buy a prepaid disposable satellite cellphone and give her the number in case, she said, *anything ever happens to me*.

Becky Parrett and four other NCFE executives, including Becky's ex-husband, were convicted on March 13, 2008. The trial took 5½ weeks, but the jury deliberated just a day and a half to reach a unanimous decision. Ten executives in all were convicted or pleaded guilty in the case. Investors in NCFE lost more than \$1.9 billion, and 275 small hospitals, nursing homes and other health care companies collapsed as a result.

Becky was released on house arrest to her \$6 million horse ranch in Carefree, Ariz., until sentencing, which was scheduled three months later.

The next day, Linda drove Becky to the airport for her flight home. Becky was scheduled to report to the Arizona authorities the following week to be fitted with her monitoring device. Two weeks later, a warrant was issued for her arrest.

Becky was on the run.

Linda tells a lie

The day the warrant was issued for Becky's arrest, Linda was questioned by a U.S. Marshal about her sister's whereabouts. Linda said she knew nothing, but she did start



Becky and attorney Gregory S. Peterson return from a lunch break at the Federal Courthouse in Columbus, Ohio, in 2008 during her trial. After 5½ weeks of testimony, she was convicted of nine counts of securities fraud and money laundering. COLUMBUS DISPATCH PHOTO BY TOM DODGE



Becky was featured on the cover of a 1997 issue of Today's Arizona Woman. PUBLISHERS WEST INC.



Becky is shown in an undated photo provided by the FBI (left) and following her arrest by Mexican authorities in 2010. AP PHOTO/FBI

checking the prepaid phone Becky had asked her to buy. Sure enough, a few days later she received a text: *I'm OK. Tell no one*.

Linda shared the news with her mother, who was convinced her daughter was dead. Nellie was instantly relieved.

But Linda didn't tell anyone else. Not Sheri, who she spoke to on the phone every day and confided nearly everything. And not the U.S. Marshal. This, some say, was Linda's first transgression.

Eight weeks passed before Linda heard from Becky again, a voicemail this time, telling her to expect a call Sunday at noon and to delete the message. That Sunday Linda and her mother both spoke briefly with Becky, who promised to call every month. Nellie's spirits were visibly lifted.

One day more boxes of Becky's possessions arrived at Linda's house. They contained cosmetics, bath towels, 29 pairs of shoes and a small box with Linda's name on it. Inside was a CD containing a manuscript of Becky's memoir, "Victim of Justice," which she believed would prove her innocence. There was also a letter instructing Linda to deliver a copy of the manuscript to a friend of Becky's who knew the chairman of the Ohio Republican Party. Becky's far-fetched hope was that he would lobby then-President George W. Bush to grant her a pardon on his way out of office.

Another person Becky wanted to have her manuscript was an attorney friend. When Linda delivered it to him, she asked about the legalities of communicating with a fugitive. He told her it wasn't against the law as long as she didn't obstruct justice.

A few days later, Becky called Linda and told her to write down an email address and password. She explained



Sheri Kent and her mother, Linda, with Sonny Boy, celebrate Christmas before they planned to move to Mexico. The following February, 10 days before they were to leave, Linda was arrested. CONTRIBUTED

that they could communicate without detection by writing each other emails and saving them as drafts, but not sending them. After they were read, they could be deleted without a trace.

According to Linda, the sisters never discussed money or Becky's location. All their communications were about distributing the manuscript, trying to secure a pardon and the health of their mother, who was now diagnosed with Alzheimer's and lived with Linda.

Eventually, the sisters' communications dwindled.

One cold morning in March 2009, two U.S. marshals rang Linda's doorbell. They made it clear it was a felony to provide false information or conceal facts from a federal officer. Then they asked Linda if she had communicated with Becky since her disappearance.

That's when Linda sealed her fate.

I have not, she said.

New life plans unravel

Sheri and her husband had long dreamed of moving to Mexico. He missed his family in La Tinaja, and Sheri fantasized about opening a B&B in Puerto Escondido. They finally decided to make their dream come true. During the next year, they would save up

Becky asked Linda to buy a prepaid disposable satellite cellphone and give her the number in case, she said, *anything ever happens to me*.

their money, sell their possessions and buy an RV, which they would drive to Mexico and live in until they got settled. When Sheri called Linda in May to tell her about the move, Linda said she wanted to go, too.

Sheri and and her husband planned to arrive in Columbus by the end of the year. They would help Linda purge her possessions and get an RV, and in February, they would caravan south. Once they were settled, Linda would go back for Nellie, who now lived in an Alzheimer's care center, and bring her to Mexico where it was cheaper to hire round-the-clock nursing care.

For the first time in a long time, Linda felt hopeful.

To Linda, none of this seemed like suspicious behavior. She'd made no secret of her plans. She bought an RV and parked it behind the house in plain view. Her yard sale was advertised on Craigslist.

For someone who knows Linda and Sheri, the move was not at all surprising. "I thought the plan was foolhardy, but not at all inconsistent with the way they've lived their lives," Trisha says.

But the U.S. marshals were watching, and they were dubious.

Shortly before the holidays, Sheri and her husband arrived in their RV.

The three of them celebrated New Year's Eve at the Crowne Plaza hotel, watching an Elvis impersonator show.

Here's to the New Year! 2010 — the best year of our lives! Linda said, as they raised their glasses of champagne at midnight.

She couldn't have been more wrong.

Life behind bars

One snowy February morning, Linda was sitting in her robe, sipping a cup of coffee and looking out the large kitchen bay window. She was leaving for Mexico in 10 days, and her mind drifted over the long list of things she still needed to accomplish. She was jolted out of her day-

ON MYAJC.COM

See Linda tell part of her story in a video on myAJC.com/personaljournies.

Here's what a reader has to say about last week's Personal Journeys:



"I just wanted to let you know how much we enjoyed your Personal Journeys article in today's paper. The angle you took was particularly touching — never thought we'd feel so sorry for an alligator. Keep up the good work."

John Baum, Dunwoody

Tell us your Personal Journey at personaljourneys@ajc.com.

dream when five black vehicles pulled into her driveway. She watched in horror as the doors flung open and out poured a SWAT team, dressed in black with guns drawn. Some of them rushed her front door while others ran around the back. Linda's heart pounded as she opened the door.

There stood the marshal.

You're under arrest, he said.

The marshals had been monitoring the sisters' communications. Linda was charged with obstruction of justice and making false statements.

Her daughters were stunned — not only because their mother was arrested, but because she'd been communicating with Becky.

"We were blindsided," Trisha says. "I was furious."

Linda would spend six months in the Delaware County jail, five of those months waiting for sentencing. She would eventually receive a six-month sentence with time served in exchange for pleading guilty to one count of lying to a federal officer.

Meanwhile, Sheri and her husband put their plans on hold and stayed in Ohio to handle her mother's affairs.

Linda credits Sheri for helping her cope during her imprisonment. She called Linda every day and encouraged her to stay positive. (Trisha was so angry she refused to call or write.) Sheri suggested Linda make a list of all the things that made her feel grateful. So Linda filled pages of a white legal pad: "My good health. The sunshine. Sheri. Mom ..." She called the list her "Grateful Prayer," and she read it several times a day.

She also attended Bible study, which was more like group therapy than religious instruction. Because she was so much older than most of the other inmates, Linda was cast in a matriarchal role. She found purpose in listening to the women talk about their troubles and sharing the wisdom she'd gleaned from her life experiences.

Still, "every day felt like a year," she says.

Pack it up, the guards said. Linda had longed to hear those words for six months. As she was escorted out of jail at the end of her sentence, the other inmates applauded. Her ordeal was finally over.

Two months later, on Oct. 26, 2010, Becky was captured in Jalisco, Mexico, in a small resort town populated with American ex-pats. According to reports, she had dyed her hair dark brown, went by the name Carol and worked for a doctor who specialized in anti-aging treatments. She handled his billing.

When she appeared in court in Columbus, the judge accused her of manipulating Linda.

"If you want to apologize to someone, you should apologize to your sister," he was quoted as saying in the Columbus Dispatch.

After 2½ years on the lam, Becky reported to a federal prison in Dublin, Calif., to be-

Continued on E6

PERSONAL JOURNEYS

The fugitive’s sister

continued from E5

gin her 25-year sentence. (A letter sent to her there last month was answered by her spokesman, son Robert Parrett, who refused to discuss this story on the record.)

Becky wrote Linda a few times after she was incarcerated, but on the recommendation of her therapist, Linda stopped responding.

10 Quiet life in Buford

Today Linda lives a quiet, active life in the basement of daughter Trisha’s house in Buford. She plays bridge, cooks, takes shag dance lessons, gardens. She tends to her mother, now 90, who lives in a care center nearby. And she’s joined The Atlanta Writers Club. She’s written a memoir about her experience called “The Fugitive’s Sister,” and she hopes to find a publisher.

She shares her large apartment with five cats and a 100-pound bullmastiff-Labrador mix named Sonny Boy. The walls are filled with family photos, spanning from her childhood to the present. Behind her desk hangs her college diploma, and the Ohio State University logo is plastered everywhere – on mugs, a stuffed bear, a toy football and a portrait of Sonny Boy, who wears it on a kerchief around his neck. On tabletops are stacks of self-help books: “From Crappy to Happy,” “Meditations for Women Who Do Too Much,” “It Ain’t Over Till It’s Over.”

She admits that lying to the U.S. Marshals was wrong, and she expresses remorse. But she maintains she was not at fault for communicating with her sister.

“My intentions were good; my actions were not,” she says.

The question remains. Why did she do it? Why did Linda



Linda (right) talks with daughter Trisha at their home in Buford. Linda lives in an apartment in the basement. HYOSUB SHIN PHOTOS / HSHIN@AJC.COM



Linda tears up as she recalls the day she was released from jail in 2010. A guard she befriended came in on her day off to escort Linda out while her fellow inmates applauded.

break the law and sacrifice her freedom to help someone who had a history of treating her so badly?

Linda answers that question with one of many platitudes she likes to quote: “To try and fail is at least to have learned; to fail to try is to risk the in-

estimable loss of what might have been.

“I wanted to try to help her, not so much for her, but for my mom and the family,” Linda says. “If she could get a pardon, why wouldn’t you help her?”

Trisha gives the question a

more reflective answer.

“I don’t know at the time if she even knew what her true motives were,” Trisha says. “I do believe she wanted to help Grandma. I do believe that hearing from Becky periodically lifted Grandma’s spirits and put her in a healthier place mentally.”

But, she adds, “I do think that Mom maybe had in the back of her mind the thought that, ‘She still can take care of me and Grandma someday if she’s found innocent. If I support her in this, I (suspect) she has money stashed in Nicaragua, maybe she’ll come back and help us all in our later years.’”

No one really knows Linda’s motives for helping Becky except Linda. Ultimately it doesn’t matter anymore.

ABOUT THE REPORTER

Suzanne Van Atten joined the AJC in 2006 as an entertainment editor. Currently she edits Personal Journeys and manages the arts and books coverage for the Sunday Living & Arts section. Previously she was associate editor of Creative Loafing Atlanta. She's also a Pushcart Prize-nominated essayist, a writing instructor at Emory Continuing Education and Shocking Real Life Writing Academy, and author of the travel guide “Moon Puerto Rico.”

She made a mistake, she got caught and she paid the price.

When you consider the spectrum of transgressions, Linda’s crime is insignificant compared to the crimes of her sister. So while Becky spends the rest of her life in prison, Linda sits on her back porch surrounded by pots of flowers and pinwheels as she watches Sonny Boy romp in the yard. She claims to feel no ill will toward Becky. Still, you can’t help but think her sister’s comeuppance makes freedom taste just a tad sweeter.

myAJC

To comment on this story and read what others are saying, go to myAJC.com/personaljournays.

COMING NEXT WEEK

Wendell Brock grew up on a farm where dogs were barely treated better than the hogs. He did not want a dog. But then Lucy moved in and wouldn’t leave.

We deliver your AJC, anywhere in the world.



Out of town on business or pleasure — take your subscription with you on your tablet.

Our Today’s Paper app is included with your subscription at no additional cost: Register your account at ajcdelivers.com/AddDigital then download your app.

ajc

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Credible. Compelling. Complete.

Need help getting started? Call 404-522-4141.