

Chapter 15



Therapy

I was screaming at the top of my voice, "I don't want to live anymore, damn it! I can't take this shit anymore!" I had so much anxiety built up inside of me. I couldn't do anything to help myself, and even if I could, I wouldn't have known where to start. I paced back and forth running my fingers through my hair. "What am I going to do?" ... "What am I going to do?" "What am I going to do?"

Pamela: Christine, you have a problem. You need to go into a hospital. You're going to make yourself sick, and when you do, no one is going to love you, because no one loves a crazy woman.

Me: You think I like feeling this way? I can't help it. I'm tired of living. It's a struggle for me just to get out of bed. I don't want to wake up anymore. What am I supposed to do? What do you suggest?

Pamela: I think you should go to a therapist, because you're going to go crazy pretty soon.

I sat there and pondered what she had said for a moment. I knew she was right. I needed to get help. I knew I was crazy, and I wasn't sure that going to mental health professionals only to confirm this fact was necessary. But I thought that if nothing else, maybe they could lead me in the right direction. In the Yellow Pages, I found a counselor in my neighborhood, and set up an appointment for that coming Monday, a whole five days away. "What am I going to do till then?" I thought as I hung up the phone.

Pamela: Good, Chris. You'll see. This is going to make you relax your mind. ... Relax, honey.

She walked over to the sofa, sat down next to me and wrapped her arms around me. I couldn't help but cry. I wondered if it were possible that it was therapy that I needed all these years. that somehow this therapist was going to ask me all of the right questions and cure me of all my mental and emotional problems. No more depression, anger, or anxiety. The therapist was going take it all away, and why not? They're trained to help people like me right?

Pamela: Christine, come on. You're going to be late. Your appointment is for 3 o'clock. It's 2:30.

Me: I'm so nervous.

Pamela: Come on. I'm going to be outside. I'll wait for you until you finish. It was about 3:15 when we arrived.

Therapist: Hi. You must be Christine. Have a seat anywhere you feel the most comfortable. My name is Betty Etkerson. You can call me Betty if you'd like.

Me: Okay, Betty.

I sat on the sofa, which gave me a bird's-eye view of her entire office. I glanced around, taking in my surroundings. The room was composed of a few scenic pictures hanging on the walls and a few plants that looked fake.

Therapist: Do you like the office?

Me: Sure, it looks comfortable.

Therapist: So where are you from?

Me: Colorado.

Therapist: Oh how beautiful! Why did you leave? Do you have family there?

Me: Yes.

I put my head down and started at the floor.

Me: I have a mother and two brothers.

Therapist: Do you think they miss you?

Me: No.

Therapist: Why not?

Me: Because she doesn't forgive me for being taken out of the home!

Therapist: Why didn't you want to live at home?

Me: Because everything was just too crazy for me to handle.

Therapist: Okay. Where did you go from there?

Me: Social Services took me into custody and put me into foster home after foster home, and group home after group home.

Therapist: Where did you enjoy living the most?

Me: A group home in Colorado Springs.

Therapist: How long did you live there?

Me: About a year and a half. Then it was closed down for lack of funds. I miss that place so much.

Therapist: Then where did you go when it closed down?

Me: Oh, I was given a choice to either go to another group home or live with the house parents of the group home. The house mother told my social worker that she wanted me to live with them, if it was all right with me of course.

Therapist: And what did you choose to do?

Me: I chose to live with her. I had feelings for her.

Therapist: What kind of feelings?

Me: Intimate, but at the time I didn't know what they were.

I think she could tell that I was getting uncomfortable talking about these feelings. There was a moment of silence.

Therapist: So did you like living there with her?

Me: At the beginning I did, but it got crazy after a while.

Therapist: What do you mean by crazy?

Me: Well, we had a relationship, she and I. It was sexual. I felt that she was sort of my girlfriend, kind of. ... I can't explain it, but she became violent at times, and that confused me.

Therapist: Did her husband know what was going on?

Me: Yeah, I'm sure he did, because she and I would sleep together

quite often, like almost every night. Whenever she would sleep with him I would get so angry. I didn't know why, and I didn't know what the feelings were. Now I know it was jealousy. I got so angry from all the violence and jealousy, that I would kick her dog.

Therapist: That's understandable. There's a saying: The husband beats the wife, the wife beats her kids, the kid beats the dog, the dog bites the cat.

Me: I think it's bad what I did. I knew that dog meant a lot to her, so I kicked it.

Later I found out that the animal had tumors in it's stomach, and that this was why the dog was overweight. I would have never kicked it if I had known it had a problem. The dog died soon after they found out that she had tumors. I started weeping as I relived the feelings of remorse for what I had done and couldn't take back.

Therapist: It's understandable. You were tired of taking care of him.

Me: What? Taking care of whom?

Therapist: Your uncle in the wheelchair.

Me: What are you talking about? What man in a wheelchair? I think you're confusing me with another patient.

Therapist: You just finished saying you used to abuse your uncle who's handicapped. I never confuse patients.

Me: Well, you did here. I would never abuse a handicapped person. I'm out of here! How much do I owe you?

My hands were trembling.

Therapist: \$75. I prefer cash.

Me: I don't have cash. All I have with me is a checkbook.

Therapist: Make it out to Betty Etkerson. I'm going on vacation for the next two weeks, so if you'd like to make an appointment to see me, it would have to be for the beginning of next month.

I couldn't help but laugh, and kept on laughing right out the door. Who is she kidding? She's already on vacation.

Pamela: So how did it go?

Me: It would have been more therapeutic had I stayed home and watched an hour of "Oprah."

Pamela and I gave up on the idea of therapy for some time, until it came right down to either therapy or insanity. She and I could no longer talk to each other in a civilized way, and after a while we both became verbally and physically abusive. So, despite my bad experience with the previous counselor, I knew we needed some sort of intervention.

I found another therapist in the phone book and set up an appointment. I explained to the secretary the gravity of the situation, and she, in turn, set up the appointment for that afternoon.

Me: Hi. I'm here to see the therapist.

Secretary: And your name is?

Me: Christine Michelle.

Secretary: Okay. Just have a seat, and Gloria will be right with you. Only a moment had passed before Gloria called us into her office.

Gloria: Have a seat. My name is Gloria, and what's yours?

Me: This is Pamela, and I'm Christine.

Gloria: Why did you choose to come to the office today?

Me: We're having a hard time communicating with each other. We can't talk anymore.

Pamela: Your fault. You're crazy.

Me: Yeah, whatever you say.

Gloria: Pamela, why do you think she's crazy?

Pamela: Because she reads self-help books, but they only make her worse.

Gloria: In what way does she get worse?

Pamela: She cries all the time for no reason.

Gloria: What book are you reading now?

Me: A book about being molested.

Gloria: You need therapy before you read books like that. You have to crawl before you walk. You can't just deal with an issue like that by yourself.

Gloria: And where was your family while you were in lock-up?

Me: Listen, what do all these questions have to do with my relationship with Pamela?

Gloria: Everything. These unresolved issues you have from your past are affecting the relationships you are having in your life now. Whether you realize it or not, the past influences the present.

Me: So what am I supposed to do from here?

Gloria: Make arrangements to see me once a week.

Me: I don't have that kind of money. You're \$75 an hour.

Gloria: Okay, you don't have to come every week. How about if we schedule you for every other week? The most important thing is that you come. You'll see after a while that you won't have so much emotional baggage, and your life will become more manageable, because you'll have less to deal with.

Pamela: Chris, you need to listen to her. You can't live like this anymore.

Me: Okay, okay. I'll come for a while and see what happens.

And I did. I went every other week. I didn't know how much I was dealing with until all of those emotions started surfacing. And some of my preconceived ideas of how things were, changed dramatically over the course of our conversations.

Gloria: It's getting close to Mother's Day. Have you decided what you're going to send to your mother?

Me: No, I don't know what to say to her.

Gloria: Well, if you could say anything to her, what would you say?

Me: I don't know.

Gloria: Let's pretend I'm your mother.

Me: I don't want to play this game; it's weird.

Gloria: Then why don't you tell me about your mother.

Me: What's there to tell? She never calls me, and less than seldom writes to me. Whenever I get the nerve up to call her, we end up talking about the activities in her church, the latest family outing, and who's pissed her off lately. Yet it never fails: The conversation always works its way back to how I was a bad girl for running away from home, especially at a time when she needed me the most.

Gloria: And would you talk about what was going on with you?

Me: Sure, for about five minutes. I would tell her about the latest tragedy in my life, and her response would be, "Oh Christine." And she would change the subject, because she didn't want to listen to my problems.

Gloria: What do her letters consist of?

Me: filled with the same insignificant details of her day-to-day life. Then she has the audacity of ending her letters with, "Love, Mom." She let me go and didn't try to get me back. What kind of mother would abandon her child? Who is she to give me over to God?

Who gave her the right to relinquish her responsibilities and place them on God's shoulders? God's not the one who got pregnant. He's not the one who married an abusive man. And He certainly shouldn't have to take on her responsibility.

Gloria: Well, you know, not everyone has a good relationship with their mother.

Me: Everyone I know does. My ex- is blessed with lots of love from her mother. I want love! I wish I could have had a family that loves me. I wish that I had a mother that takes an interest in my life, and considers my feelings. But no. Instead I have a mother who when it comes to facing our family problems, generously distributes blame to every family member, excluding herself, of course.

Gloria: So you think she's in denial?

Me: Absolutely. Whenever she was asked about what was going on in the family, she belittled the fact that there was child abuse going on in the home, or would simply deny the allegations altogether.

Gloria: Do you hold her responsible?

Me: Ray was the one who did the abuse, for the most part.

Gloria: Did she know about it?

Me: Yes!

Gloria: Then why wouldn't you hold her responsible if she knew about it and did nothing to stop it?

Me: I don't know. She had a bad life.

Gloria: Okay, let's look at it from a different angle. What if the roles were reversed, and you were the mother and she were the child. Would you have done something to stop the abuse?

Me: Yes! At any cost!

Gloria: Even if you were abused as a child?

Me: All the more reason I would.

Gloria: Then why should it be any different for her? What if this situation were a story in the newspaper? Would you forgive the woman of this crime, or would you hold her responsible?

Me: Oh my God. [Sigh.] responsible.

I loved my mother with all my heart. For years, I would cry out to God, "Why? I love her, Why can't things be different? Why doesn't she call me? Why did all of these things have to happen? I need my mother. Why doesn't she care about me?" I tried sending gifts, but the phone still never rang, and despite the many letters I sent to her, she still didn't want to speak to me. I realized through time and frivolous attempts that she just didn't love me, and you can't make someone love you.

Gloria suggested I write a letter to ray and get my feelings out on paper, and so I did. She said it wasn't necessary that he ever read it, the point was for me to write it and get those feelings out.

Ray,

This is the one and only letter you will receive from me. I believe this letter will be quite sufficient in summing up the feelings I have for you. You molested me! An example of this is you watching television while putting a pillow between your legs, and you telling me to lay my head down on the pillow. I felt very uncomfortable, and you knew that and you did it anyway. You and I both know what you did was wrong. Another example is when we were moving from California. You had a friend with you in the living room, and you stuck your finger (index) up my rectum, and you laughed, while your friend watched.

Mother walked in and said, "Ray that's not wife."

That was so humiliating and irresponsible, perverse, and ruthless on your part. You neglected me. Sure, you gave me shelter, clothed me and fed me. This I appreciate. You built me a skateboard. But you never once told me that you cared about me, or that I was at all special to you. You and Mother were always caught up in your own problems, or you always went to your friends, or you were at work, or I was always sent outside to play so you didn't have to see me.

As a child I wished I didn't exist. You punished me inappropriately. By humiliating me or beating me. Never once did you sit down with me and explain what I was and wasn't supposed to do with some sense of normality.

Instead you only instilled fear in me. Because of all this, I never thought of you as my father, only as a big bad wolf. What a shame.

I grieve the relationship we could have had. I've always been frightened of you! Always wondering what I've done wrong, when my next punishment was going to come. I was always frightened of what you were going to do next. From age nine till I left the house at 13, I hated your existence. I wished you would die, and I felt guilty for feeling that way. Mostly because I wanted to take your life from you especially after we moved from California to Colorado.

The way you affected my life now as an adult is such that I have this deep hatred for all men. I have even become masochistic wanting to hurt myself, tear the flesh from my body. I feel I must be perfect, and if I'm not I beat myself up emotionally. I don't deserve punishment, but I find myself in relationships where there is much violence. In my first real relationship, I was beating up my lover, and in my second I was the victim. These relationships lasted two years each. I have never felt secure ever. No matter how many times someone says, "I love you," I can't believe them. I don't believe anyone could love me. I don't know if it's because I felt unloved by you, or if I just feel that I don't deserve love. It's too bad that our family wasn't healthy, and that my childhood wasn't a happy one. One filled with love, respect, and above all security. I really grieve the childhood I could have had, and the father-daughter relationship we could have had. What I want from you now is for you not to treat people the way you have treated me. Please never do what you did to me to another girl, or even to a grown woman. All I want from you is for you not to infest anyone else's life with your cruelty.

**Good Bye Forever,
Christine Michelle**

My Mother and Raymond finally got a divorce after 23 years of marriage. At first he stopped wearing his wedding ring at work, then he started dressing up and wearing cologne. All the signs were there. If you smell smoke chances are there's a fire. She told me that I was disinherited during the court proceedings. And that she took Raymond to the cleaners. She went on to say that he would never get the boys, and she would be seeing me one last time, because they were going to be using up their time share in Orlando. I told Pamela about my mother wanting to come visit me.

Pamela: Where is she going to sleep? This is only a two-bedroom apartment.

Me: I don't know, but we'll figure something out. I haven't seen

her in years. It's my mother, and I don't know when I'll ever see her again.

I knew that the whole family thing was difficult for Pamela because her mother had died when she was only a child. And here it was close to Mothers Day.

Pamela: You are going to be alone the rest of your life, because your probably as crazy as your mother.

Me: Well, at least I have a mother!

As soon as the words left my mouth I thought. Oh my God what did I just say? That was the end of the argument. She fell on the floor and cried and didn't stop crying for a long time. I felt so bad. What had come over me? I knew that some things not even in anger should ever be said.

My Mother and brothers Steven and Robert stayed in Orlando for a week or so. I prepared for their visit for days. I had been so lonely for years living in Miami all by myself. Finally the day had arrived they were here, we were able to enjoy a few hours at the pool side, Robert was a small child running around chasing Lizards, Steven soaked up some sun. Mother professed her love to me, saying look into my eyes can't you see the love I have for you, though all of her actions say other wise. Even though they were supposed to stay for three days with me, they stayed for only a few hours. Mother threw a fit when I suggested counseling for Steven. I saw something in Stevens eyes that suggested something wasn't right. He and I endured much verbal abuse and I endured some physical abuse. Of course we both needed help. I ran away, but Steven stayed in my mothers insanity. Robert came along 14 years later. So he was spared much of this grief.

Pamela walked into the living room with a big bowl of spaghetti. She served us all. And then sat next to me, as everyone began eating.

Mother: So are you still going to counseling?

Me: Yes, every other week.

Mother: Is it helping you to talk about the past with a perfect stranger.

Me: Yes. In fact, Steven would probably benefit from counseling, too, don't you think?

Mother: He doesn't need counseling. Steven, your sister thinks your crazy. Do you think your crazy?

Steven: No, I'm fine. I wish Christine would stop acting like she's older than you.

Me: You knew how he would react to that question. You know he needs therapy.

Mother controlled Steven by using the silent treatment. He did whatever it took to appease her. He was slow and always had been, not retarded just slow, and different in many ways. It was sick of her to manipulate a grown man like that, she has done it all of his life, her own private army. I woke up the next morning, and she was running through the parking lot with my brothers without saying good-bye. So I threw a robe around myself and ran after her.

Me: You're going to leave without saying good-bye?!

She turned around.

Mother: We're not welcome here.

Me: Why? Because I don't agree with you? I love Steven.

Mother: Good-bye, Shannon, Christine, or whoever the hell you are!

I just stood there and watched them drive away. This was her idea of love.

~O~

I loved the name Christine. So much that I changed my name legally. The opportunity presented its self to me at work one day. I was dancing at stir Crazy and there was this customer looking for another girl.

Robert: Have you seen Gena?

Me: No, she's not in at the moment, you know how we are we have stripper time. She could be here in an hour , or she could be here tomorrow. Do you want to leave anything for her? I'll make sure she gets it.

Robert: Well I have to talk to her about her name change.

Me: You're a lawyer?

Robert: Yes, she just recently got married and I am here to finalize some Paper work.

Me: How much does it cost to change your name?

Robert: About \$500 but I'll do it for \$350

Me: Lets go. Let's do it right now.

Robert : Do you have a name in mind?

Me: Yes, I have no family so Christine Michelle. Christine for who I am now, and Michelle for who I have been.

He gave me his card, I went to his house the next day, I signed some papers, we went to court soon after, I stood in front of a Judge, he asked me if I had another reason to change my name if I was trying to avoid bills or anything else, I said "No" and just that fast a shake of the hand, I was, "Christine Michelle"