

Chapter 13

Domestic Violence National Hotline

1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

1-800-787-3224 (TTY)

www.ndvh.org



Domestic Violence

When I met Linda I liked her right away. We met at a nightclub in Miami called Splash. It was New Year's Eve 1998. She was watching me dance alone on the dance floor. When I exhausted myself and walked to get a drink she followed me with her eyes. I then walked back to the dance floor and watched as everyone else was having fun.

Linda: Hi can you tell me what time it is?

She asked as she suggested pointing to her wrist.

Me: Yes it's about 11:30 pm

Linda: Do you have a girl friend here?

Me: No, I'm alone and single.

We continued talking for awhile longer. She gave me her number. I called the next day and we talked for hours that first night and all the rest to follow. She was such a nice girl, and I thought she was one of the smartest people I had ever met. After being with each other for awhile, we started using words such as, I like you, and I miss you, I can't wait to see you. I had never experienced this before. I had this desire to be with her all the time, and I missed her when she was gone. I was frightened yet intrigued. The more of her I got, the more I wanted. I had never felt secure before, and yet when I was with her I felt like everything was going to be fine. She was constantly reassuring me that she wasn't ever going to leave me, and I believed her. She showed me nothing but kindness and an intense interest in me and my life. Linda wanted to know everything about me, and she told me she was going to help me in my life, and she did. I had accumulated some debts due to mistakes in my life, and she helped me resolve them, and in some cases, she paid them.

I never had anyone just take care of me. She loved me, and I knew it. Sure, I had fun times with Jane, but nothing compared with the love that Linda showed me. I loved her touching me, and the closeness that we shared. She kept referring to everything as we, or us. The question in the back of my mind: Do I finally belong to someone?

After a few months, I had to move out of Jane's apartment. Not only were Jane and I losing the apartment over unpaid bills, but Linda and I found it hard to be apart. Jane was in love with me, and she told me not to leave, but I had to. I didn't want to hurt her, but I wanted so desperately to experience love, and where ever love could take me.

Me: Jane, we have to talk. There's something I need to tell you.

Jane: Go ahead, shoot.

Me: I'm going to move into my own place.

Jane: You're going to move in with her, aren't you?

Me: No, but she'll probably stay with me sometimes. She's my lover; what do you expect?

Jane: But I love you, Christine. You barely know her.

Me: But I have feelings for her. They're not the same as the feelings I have for you, you're my best friend.

Jane: I was there for you when you needed me.

Me: I know, but I can't be with you the way you want me to.

Jane: Fine, Use me, then leave me.

Me: It's not like that. We'll always be friends. I don't want to lose you, but I can't stay just because you want to be my lover. The feelings aren't mutual. I walked out and heard her calling for me. I kept walking there was nothing left for me to do. Linda and I went apartment hunting. It was hard to get into an apartment. I had no references. Eventually we came across an apartment that didn't care they only wanted to see the money for the deposit. So I moved in right away. To my surprise Linda moved in with me. Her family had no idea she was a lesbian. That was until one day. I looked at her. She was obviously distraught.

Me: What's wrong?

Linda: I told my mother.

Knowing what she was talking about, I asked anyway.

Me: You told her what?

Linda: That I'm a lesbian, and now she says that she's going to kill herself.

Me: Oh, give me a break. She's not going to kill herself just because you like women. She just wants to control you. What are you going to do?

Linda: I want to stay here. I want my own life. You don't understand Latin families. You're supposed to stay home with your family until you're either married, or going to school.

Me: Well, babe, I can't relate. You know everyone in the world knows I'm a lesbian, so you know what my attitude is on that issue: Take me the way I am, or leave me alone.

Linda's mother kept calling the apartment threatening to kill herself.

Linda: What should I do? What should I do? She's going to kill herself.

Me: Unplug the damn phone!

~O~

Linda and I had strange experiences together, just like any other couple, but some of those experiences were life-changing for me. Penny, the apartment manager in our complex, had a heart attack. It was terrible. None of the tenants knew what to do. Linda and I were in the living room watching TV when we heard a strange noise at the door. I opened it, and there stood Penny.

Penny: I can't breathe!

Linda sat her in a chair, and I dialed 911. Paramedics were there within

minutes. I just sat there and watched her die right there in my living room. It was so strange, almost as if it wasn't happening. How could someone just die like that? One minute she's walking around, the next minute she stops breathing. I just couldn't believe how fragile life was. A few days had passed and we got word that Penny died from a heart attack. Her daughter came to pick up her belongings. Linda told Penny's daughter that her mother's last words were, "Tell my daughter I love her" The people in the complex picked through what was left behind after her family took what they wanted they were like vultures picking at a dead carcass. I hope that when I die people will care more about me than about the things I leave behind. Things can be replaced, but a person can't be replaced.

~O~

Soon after this experience, Linda took me to the hospital where she was a nurses aid still studying to be a nurse. She told me about one of her patients who was dying of AIDS.

Linda: His lover has been visiting him for some time now, and he too has been diagnosed with having AIDS. Can you imagine seeing your lover dying of the very thing that soon is going to consume you too? He day after day watches his lover dwindle away to nothing.

Me: No, I can't imagine that.

Linda: I hope if one of us dies first, it's you, so I can take care of you. I just sat there quietly, thinking, oh my God, what a beautiful thing to say. Linda wanted me to get in touch with my family after all of these life and death experiences.

Linda: Why don't you try to find your father?

Me: He's dead.

Linda: What happened? He robbed a store and got caught but while trying to escape they shot him in the back of the neck. I was told he died in prison.

Linda: Maybe his family will know who you are, why don't you try? I thought about it. what do I have to loose? I have no one any way. So I did I went into the telephone records at FIU and found his family, Jay had a brother named Ray. I called and on the other end of the phone was a woman's voice.

Me: Hello, may I please speak to Ray?

Woman: Who is this? I am Jays daughter and I want to talk to Raymond. He is my Uncle.

Woman: He's not here and Jay died years ago.

She didn't say another word she just hung up. I called back.

Me: Can you just give him the message?

Woman: Jay died years ago in prison.

Me: Please give Raymond the message.

I waited for months and finally couldn't take it any more I called again and got the same woman with the same response. I assumed it was Rays wife. Why won't she give him the message? Damn it, why doesn't she care? She hung up never telling anyone I called. I gave up trying to find my fathers family. Linda was determined for me to find some sort of family ties.

Linda: Christine, family is important. Do you have any family on your mothers side?

Me: Yes. I have an Aunt Claudia in Indiana my mothers sister. We went to

Indiana when I was eight year old mother decided to see her family. I loved my Aunt Claudia we all went to the Indianapolis state fair. I was so happy. My Aunt was trying to win me a stuffed animal, mother told her not to bother but my aunt just kept on playing she sat there for quit some time till she finally won. And I walked out of that park with that doggie. I love my Aunt Claudia because no one has ever done that for me before.

Linda: I think you should try to contact her.

Me: For what? They don't care about me.

Linda: How do you know? When was the last time you spoke to them?

Me: Oh, about 13 years ago.

Linda: Don't waste another day! Call your mother and get the number.

(a short pause)

Me: Okay.

So I did. My mother didn't want to give me the number but I told her that if she didn't I would find it anyway. She reluctantly gave it to me, and I contacted my aunt.

Aunt: Hello?

Me: Hi. This is Michelle, Adrienne's daughter.

Aunt: Oh my God. It's been so long.

I could hear her voice crack. We made small talk trying to get acquainted, but then all of my emotions rose to the surface.

Me: Why didn't anyone try to contact me when I was taken out of my home? Why didn't anyone try to get me?

Aunt: Well, your mother wouldn't tell us where you were, and we had no way of finding you.

Me: I received one letter, that was from Uncle Mathew, and I never heard from anyone again. My mother never came to visit me when I was in the group home or even lock up, only once did she go to the group home but that was only to intercept that letter, apparently she gave him the address to the home and he wrote to me, she ran to the home and was only there long enough to take the letter from me.

Aunt: Why don't you come out here and meet your kinfolk? You can stay here. We have an extra room.

Linda: What is she saying?

I cupped my hand over the receiver.

Me: She wants me to go visit.

Linda: Tell her you're going.

Me: What! Are you out of your mind? I don't even know these people.

Linda: I think you should go.

I could hear my aunt in the background.

Aunt: You're not going to believe who I have on the other end of this phone.

It's Michelle Adrienne's daughter

(I interrupted.)

Me: Okay. I'll take the first flight I can.

And I did. I was there within two weeks. I was picked up at the airport by my aunt and her daughter, Becky. I got so emotional that I had to be alone.

Me: Can you please take me to a hotel?

Aunt: Are you sure that's what you want? You know you can stay with us for free.

Me: No, I need to be alone. I just ... I just ... I don't know.

Aunt: Okay. You call us when you're ready. We'll be here.

I spent that first week intoxicated. I had so many different feelings inside of me. I was sad, happy, angry, resentful, hopeful, all at the same time. I

didn't know what to do with myself. I had a hard time dealing with the fact that for all of these years I had a family that existed, yet I was completely alone.

Why couldn't my aunt have been my mother? Why couldn't I have been adopted into a loving family? It took me a week to get it together. I went bar to bar drinking and would come back to the hotel crying. When I was all cried out and gained self-control, I called.

Me: Can you come get me? I'm at the hotel.

Aunt: Your uncle Larry will be there in a few minutes, Hold tight.

Once we got to the house I recognized everyone and everything. My grandmother was sitting on the sofa, patting the pillow beside her.

Grandmother: Come sit next to me.

And I did.

Grandmother: Do you still do drugs?

Me: Who told you I do drugs?

Grandmother: Your mother told us you were doing drugs, and that's why they took you out of the home.

Me: I ran away from home because I was being abused.

Grandmother: Sexually?

I looked at the floor.

Me: Yes, and other reasons.

Grandmother: Do you know he's not your father?

Me: Yes I know. Thank God for small favors.

She patted my arm.

Grandmother: Do you remember my feet?

Me: Yes.

Her toes were twisted, one over the other.

Grandmother: Do you know how they got that way?

Me: No.

Grandmother: My shoes were too small, I raised five kids and didn't have enough money to buy new shoes. I had to walk to work, so some of my toes broke.

Me: Oh my goodness.

Grandmother: When you were little girl, you saw my feet. You rubbed them, saying, "poor Grandma, poor Grandma" I'll never forget that. I love you, Michelle, and God loves you, too.

I put my head down when she mentioned God. I was angry at Him for allowing all of this to happen to me, all of those lonely years.

Grandmother: He loves you, and He always will.

Soon it was time for me to return to Miami. My aunt and I got to know things about each other, and I was able to meet some of the relatives. My aunt and I kept in touch through letters, but she was right: No one could make up for those lost years.

I never had a relationship with family before, I didn't know what it entailed or how one was suppose to behave. I was wild and didn't know anything about anything, but Linda on the other hand was educated and responsible. She taught me things just like a mother to a child.

I didn't know how to relate to people. But Linda could talk to anyone about anything. I admired her and envied her at the same time. She taught me about life and what it took to live it in the real world: paying bills, following the laws of the road, going to work, going to school, paying past debts. She was so good to me. I didn't understand why I envied her, when all the while she was only trying to help me. It wasn't her fault that she had a loving

family and I didn't, but I held it against her. When she would talk about her family and the things they would do for her, I would hit her, yet blame it on something else.

I started drinking more and more over the time we were together. I didn't want to dance anymore, and I wanted to help her understand what I was going through, so I took her to the beach and there in my car I made my point.

Linda: Why are we here? I didn't bring a bathing suit with me.

Me: You're not going to need it here. Now take off your clothes!

Linda: What are you talking about? I can't do that!

Me: I said take off your clothes now.

Linda: I can't, I can't do that!

Me: Why not?

Linda: Someone will see me.

Me: I know. I go through that every night when I dance.

Linda just sat there, dumbfounded. After that, she registered me in school to give me some sort of direction in my life. Not only did she register me for school; she actually tutored me. She was always going that extra mile for me.

~O~

I didn't know how to change, and fear surrounded me. If I try, I am bound to fail. I feared failure so much that I avoided trying.

When I got frustrated I drank. I knew it wasn't going to solve my problems, But I drank anyway to forget my problems. I wanted to change, but I didn't know how, this is who I am how could I change into someone I'm not? I wanted to change my life, to stop drinking, have a normal job. I had the capability and a person who was willing to try to make it all come true for me, but fear and emotional problems turned my dreams into disappointments. I cheated, and lied. I would get drunk, and come home at unusual hours. Linda would question me. I would purposely flick on the light, though she laid there sleeping.

Linda: Where were you?

Me: None of your business!

I got into bed with my clothes on and started to touch her breasts.

Linda: I need to get some sleep.

She pushed my hands away.

Linda: I have school in the morning. Respect me, Christine.

I mocked her.

Me: I need to get some sleep. I need to get some sleep.

Linda: You're drunk. I don't want this.

I ignored her and kept touching her, anyway.

Linda: Stop it!

She rolled over, with her back to me. I pulled her panties to the side, and as she struggled with her hands to mine, I jumped on top of her.

Linda: Stop this, Chris. What are doing? Stop it.

Me: Shut up. You're my lover. It's your obligation.

Linda: No!

Linda: Stop this!

Me: No!

I tried sucking on her neck.

Linda: Why are you doing this to me?

I didn't have an answer. Soon the tears started to flow. Once I saw that,

I comforted her.

Me: Okay, I'm sorry. I just got carried away.

I wanted to see the tears. Why did I do that? I knew I had a problem. These were things done to me. I went and sought out help. I called 911 and told them that I had a problem with domestic violence. They told me of a place I could go for free counseling. So I went. I went for seven sessions. They taught me how to deal with anger, which was just to walk away from the situation completely until I cooled down. If the situation didn't get better I was told to seek out help. And it worked.

~O~

My drinking was my biggest problem of all. I drank at work, at home, when I was depressed, happy, sad, frustrate, I drank all the time. And when I wasn't drinking, my next drink was all I could think about. When I was drunk I sometimes saw Linda as my mother. I was sick. I couldn't make the distinction between the two, and I felt somehow I took on the characteristics of Ray, my stepfather. But how could that be if he wasn't really my father by blood? Where was all of this anger and pain coming from? And why couldn't I control it, and myself? I was doing things and saying things that I didn't want to.