

Chapter 20



My Name is Christine, and I'm an Alcoholic

I started drinking when I was 17. Sure, I had drank when I was running away from the group homes, foster homes and whatever institution I had visited, but I didn't really start drinking until I hit the clubs -- of course, gay bars. I was so nervous but I just had to go. I was lonely and wanting companionship and, yes, sex. I wanted to experiment and to feel whatever it was that I needed to feel. I walked into my first bar in Denver. It was the only lesbian bar I knew of that was a beer and wine bar. I wasn't old enough to drink liquor. There were only 20 girls in the whole place. I stood there at the bar alone just gazing around the room watching the other girls touch each other as they danced on the dance floor. I was nervous, unable to approach anyone for fear of seeming stupid. Even if I were to talk to a girl, what would I say? What do you say to start a conversation? What would I talk about? I don't know the first thing about what's going on. Bartender: What are you going to have? ... Miss ... what are you going to have?

I wasn't sure what to order, I had never ordered a drink before, so I was at a loss.

I cased the room for something to drink. I saw a girl drinking a beer. ... I didn't want that. I didn't know what I wanted, but I did know what I didn't want. I saw another girl drinking what looked to be a bottle of soda.

Me: I'll have that.

Bartender: That will be four dollars please.

As I put it to my lips, I could feel the sparkling mist of the contents. As I took my first drink I tasted what seemed to be lemonade.

Me: Wow. This is good what is it.

Bartender: A citrus wine cooler.

I finished it quickly and then proceeded to order another one, and another one and still another one until I started feeling really good. In fact, it was the best feeling I had ever felt. All of what was bothering me slipped away, all of my inhibitions disappeared. I was not about to let this feeling go. I finally felt comfortable in my own skin. Peace like I had never known. I drank every weekend, and my drinking bled into my work and home life. Soon I was drinking all of the time, thinking nothing of it. I drank for years

and years, wondering why my life had become such a mess. I felt it was God's fault for bringing the people into my life who were in my life. I was so angry and resentful of everyone and everything. I saw no silver lining. I had no control of my life. I avoided any responsibility. I only acknowledged the responsibilities I could not avoid, like tickets or rent. I didn't appreciate any love that was shown to me. People would help me, and I wouldn't even say thank you. I just went on doing whatever it was that I was doing. Was it youth? Was it me? ... I don't know. I was ungrateful for life and all that is precious. My hate made the day night and all colors black and white. My self-pity threw me into a tailspin of empty relationships. I was searching for anyone who would tell me "I love you" Whether it was true or not it didn't matter to me. I just wanted to hear the words. I clung to any woman who would let me. I was so needy. I knew there was something wrong with me, that I was crazy or something. I couldn't breathe unless something was being stroked, whether it

was my ego, someone constantly telling me that she loved me or sex. I tried anything to get rid of that terrible empty feeling that never seemed to leave. I ran through lovers, always having one on reserve because I was resentful with the one I was with. I was always harboring resentment for something they had or hadn't done. I expected my lovers to be able to read my mind, to know exactly what I needed when I needed it and to fulfill what it was that I was lacking. I was always hurting inside, and it wasn't their fault, thought I made them pay. I either hit my lovers or cheated on them if they got out of line. My behavior was unpredictable. I manipulated and controlled everything, I didn't want to get hurt, because I was hurt already from all the baggage I was carrying around with me. I was living my past and my present all at the same time. I drank to forget the past, though I never really let it go. I toasted to the future, even though it scared me. I accepted that I was lost and would remain that way until death. I thought that God had abandoned me, and that He didn't care how I was feeling, and I was trying to avoid everything in my life with sex, drugs, and alcohol. But as everything does, it all caught up to me. I had given up on life. Or so I thought

I then lost someone I loved very much, her name was Amalia. I had fallen in love with her the moment I saw her. And when we spoke she just took me away to a place in my heart I had never been before. I loved her, all though I was in the middle of a relationship, that didn't stop me from falling madly in love with her. After some time I was planning my days around when I would see her again. She and I were working in a strip club together. I was a bartender; she was a waitress. We were involved within day of meeting each other. I would brush up against her, finally I got the nerve to ask her to be with me. Our first kiss was that of wine and violins. She took my breath away.

I would watch her work she took my complete attention. And when the club was slow, we would sit and talk about life, sometimes for hours. I cherished every moment we spent together, I missed her whenever she was away she took business trips because her passion was fashion design. She would get these big gigs and off she went. Sometimes she left on a moment's notice if she didn't the opportunity would be lost. When she was on those trips I would sulk, I would get the occasional post card from her in the mean time. My life would stop until she got back into town. I would spend my time waiting for the calls that never came.

I loved her so much that my heart ached. One day at work she just sat and

thought. I asked what was on her mind. Finally she said, "It's nothing. It's just that my ex-lover called, and she wants me back." She reassured me that it was over, that her thoughts were only of me and that that chapter in her life was closed. But as her trips were longer I would suffer all the more. I left my lover because Amalia was bleeding into my life, I could no longer be with anyone else. I would wait and wait and wait. She would only come home to Miami long enough to pack again. She talked about going to San Francisco and whether I would want to go. I thought and said, "With you, anywhere. There is nowhere I wouldn't go with you." I was pretty much packing, waiting for her to say "let's go". But when she got back from one of her trips.

Amalia: I am going to see my X-lover Bridgette

I was over taken by grief.

Me: Why?!

Amalia: She wants to speak to me. I don't know what I want to do. I still have feelings for her.

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. "I love you," I said as I watched her walk out the door. She was gone for about a month, and then she came back home, only to leave again for Key West.

Amalia: I need to think, Christine. I will be there only for a few days. I will call you in two days.

And of course I waited for the call that never came. Two weeks passed before I got my call.

Amalia: I am coming over. I have to tell you something.

Me: Is everything okay?

Amalia: What I have to say to you has to be face-to-face.

Me: Okay, I 'm waiting.

She came within minutes, as though she had been outside, calling to make sure the coast was clear. I greeted her at the door, but as I went to give her a kiss she turned her cheek to me. And didn't look at me.

Amalia: I am going back to Bridget. I am sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you.

Me: What did I do?

Without another word she left. I was screaming her name after her as I ran behind her car.

"AMALIA! AMALIA!"

And she was gone from that moment on. I cried like I never cried before, so it seemed -- oceans of sadness. I loved her more then she could have ever known. I gave up completely. I told myself and God that whatever happened from that point on, I didn't care. I had lost my business and what had seemed to be the love of my life. I really didn't care. I knew that suicide wasn't an option for the moment because I had been there before. So I drank. It was the most natural thing to do.

Everyone was telling me to snap out of it, to get it together, to get over it and find someone new. You're thinking about her, and she is not coming back. Why sweat someone who doesn't love you, they all would chant. I lost my job, because I couldn't cope with the loss and still handle my responsibilities. I drank and drank and knew that still I had to earn some kind of money. What to do? Only one thing came to mind: stripping. Getting my life back on track didn't seem like a feasible option. I didn't want to fix anything; I just wanted to be numb. So ... I drank myself into tomorrow and the day after that and the day after that until they all ran together. I went to bed with a drink in my hand and woke up to a drink. I didn't bother with toast and eggs; it was Baileys and Kahlua. I don't know how I was able to

function. I was working for my next drink. I didn't care anymore what was to become of me. I was tired and couldn't get my second wind. I drank and knew that there was no more hope. I accepted that and the reality that I believed to be my own. I have no control of my life, so why care where it takes me? I

drank relentlessly for the next five years. I had one or two lovers in between, but I was missing my Amalia

~O~

I went to a lesbian club in Miami after I got off of work one night. I walked in and of course said "Hi" to all of the girls I knew. I then cased out the place looking for someone to get to know. And I found her dancing with friends, I stood there staring at the tightest skirt in the place. She looked back at me and gave me a wink. I waited next to the bar and ordered myself a margarita. After she was finished dancing with her friends she made her way over to me.

Martha: Hi my name is Martha what's yours?

Me: Christine, would you like a drink?

Martha: Sure.

I ordered us a drink and then another one and as we drank we became more acquainted to the point that she asked me if I wanted to go home with her. I agreed but .

Me: Lets not have sex until morning. We've been drinking and I want To make sure we are both in our right mind when that happens.

Martha: That night turned into 3 years.

She gave me a gold necklace two weeks after being together. I was so surprised. she told me that her ex lover was going to turn her into the INS. I felt it was wrong for her ex lover to threaten her with deportation. Her X would call her every hour on the hour. Morning, noon, and night. Martha told me that she had absolutely no family, I could relate to her story I felt lonely too. She went on to say that she was from Honduras. She was raised by her grand mother because her mother had left her when she was a child. When her grand mother took ill and was unable take care of her, Martha was taken to an orphanage where she stayed until she was of legal age to be on her own. She started crying I felt so bad for her. I just wanted to take care of her for the rest of her life. So I took matters into my own hands. I quickly moved in with her and fought with her ex lover until she left Martha alone. Everything was fine initially but as the months passed I was becoming more and more unhappy. I wasn't in love, and she knew it. I was there because I didn't want Martha to face life alone.

~O~

One night while bartending in a night club I ran into an old customer I hadn't seen in years.

Customer: Where have you been I haven't seen you in years

Me: Writing a book, actually the story of my life

Customer: Well did you edit it? I am an editor for a big law firm, I would do it for you for free

Me: You would edit my book for me? Wow great sure. Wow thank you . Where are you staying so I can give it to you. A hotel in Miami beach. Just give me a call and we will get together. He scratched his cell phone number on a piece of paper and gave it to me. I gave him a big hug.

Me: I will be seeing you soon. I will call you tomorrow. And I did then we made arrangements for the following day. He was a big help to me, I could write but I could never spell. He informed me that I needed to get my book copy written and gave me the address to send it to get copy written.

Me: I wrote a story and am actually am trying to get it published I can't seem to get the story out there. It's just sitting in my top drawer at this point.

Customer: What about putting it on the internet?

Me: What is the internet?

He laughed and then got me all caught up.

Customer: Do you have a computer?

I right away started looking for someone to put me on the internet. I was dancing at Club X when I saw him sitting there. He had a shirt on that said computer specialist. I kept staring at his shirt. When I got off the stage and went around asking for tips. I stopped and asked him.

Me: Do you know anything about the internet?

Ken: Of course I am a computer net work engineer.

Me: I need to talk to you.

When I came back around to talk to him he asked me if I would do a lap dancer for him. I did one after the other three. All the while saying I had a project that I needed help with. I filled him in on what I was doing and then he said he would put a web site together for me using front page. I went to his home with my book and scanned all of the pages in my book into his computer. I couldn't pay him for helping me because money was tight I was practically supporting Martha. So instead I cleaned his office. And cleaned and helped him straighten around his home.

I was sober for about three days I got sober on a Thursday. I worked double on Friday and then Saturday, by Sunday I was dead. Martha woke me up Sunday morning. I was half out of it.

Martha: Christine the dishes are dirty.

Me: Wash them.

I reached into my pocket and there I found only \$50

Where is my money?! Then I looked into my bag thinking that maybe it was there, but it wasn't then I realized that Martha had been stealing from me.

~O~

I was drinking much more then my body could take. Why was I drinking like that? I lost complete control. I remembered that years before, I had lost control of drinking and made it a point to stop. And here I was once again, but it was so much worse. I was drinking much more then I ever had before. At this point I had been drinking for 16 years. I was living an empty existence. I was so very lonely but excepted that this was my life. I was tired but kept on moving anyway, I was sick but kept on drinking, hoping I could find the comfort I needed in a bottle. But no matter how much I drank there was no peace to be found.

I danced with a girl named Diamond years ago. She was a tall, voluptuous,

beautiful blonde bombshell who was a known alcoholic to everyone. She was banned from drinking at work. The boss knew if she anything it was all down hill from there.

She had slurred speech and swayed back and forth when she walked. What is to come of this girl? Everyone pitied her. I remember Diamond sitting at her locker. It seemed as though she would sit there putting on her makeup for hours, constantly going back to fix her hair, clothing, makeup or something. Little did anyone know she was self-medicating. I walked to the back to change costumes and looked over only to find Diamond drinking out of a hair spray bottle.

Me: What are you doing?

Diamond: Aw, nothing.

Me: Why are you drinking hair spray?

Diamond: It's not hair spray; it's Crown Royal. The boss won't let me drink on the job. And he checks my work bag every so often, so I put my stash in a hair care bottle. He would never think to look in there.

Me: Why do that? Why don't you just stop?

Diamond: I tried when I was going to AA, but I fell off the wagon. Don't ask me so many questions.

I walked away thinking, what would bring a person to do that? How could someone need something so badly that they have to hide it? What's next for her? What if her addiction gets worse, then she's dead? I feared for her life. And I handed her a poem. Maybe it would cheer her up, maybe just maybe:

With each lock
There is a key
And we must search
So desperately
With each dream
We do endeavor
It is our hopes
To never, say never.

Me: Diamond, this is something I wrote when I was hurting. I hope it helps, just in case you're hurting.

She sat there and read it in front of me quietly.

Diamond: Thank you. You're deeper than I thought. Sorry for being a bitch. I just don't like anyone in my business.

I remember that moment as if it were yesterday. And here it is 12 years later.

I was drinking all the time, I drank as soon as I got to work to "loosen up" and didn't stop drinking until I left, I always had a drink in my hand. I no longer made any sense I would just repeat myself I was pathetic asking for a drink hardly able to stand on my own, I would lean on the guys and say in a slurred speech "Wana buy me a drink" it wasn't like I could offer them any type of interesting conversation. I remember I would be talking to people and they would be looking at me with a strange look on their face, they would say things like "I don't understand you" or "your repeating your self" I felt like I was in this invisible bubble looking at people and they couldn't reach me. Sometimes after I would leave work I would go to the closest bar by my house and drink all night long until the bar closed. I would fall asleep with a stomach full of wine and would wake up drunker than I had gone to bed. I was always drunk. It was more than a habit, it was my life style. I

knew I was dying not only on the inside but also the out side. I lost the pigment in my skin eventually, and instead of taking that as a warning, I went to the store and bought face base make up to hide the fact that the color in my face was changing, I was turning some strange shade of grey. There were times I would forget to take a shower, And I would go to work smelling like the night before, and when ever I did remember to take a bath, I would be so tired and drunk that I would run the bath water slide myself in and fall asleep only to wake up hours later in freezing cold water. I didn't eat healthy for years. Snacking on pop corn and pizza, eating nothing but fast food.. I was sick and gradually getting sicker. Eventually food wasn't staying in my system. I would eat and moments later I was off to the bath room, because the food would just pass right through me. Instead of taking that as a warning I went to GNC and bought power drinks. I thought well if food won't stay down at least I will get my vitamins. Eventually the customers stopped buying me drinks. Now how was I going to loosen up? I decided to smuggle Vodka into the club in my bag. Since I couldn't get a drink off of the customer, I would just take a few hits off my bottle. One night I was looking in the mirror at the dressing room door to make sure the manager wasn't going to catch me drinking my own stash when all of the sudden I got a good look in the mirror at myself. Oh my God I turned into Diamond.

Oh my God, what have I done to myself? What am I doing here? I am 33 and still drinking. What am I going to do? I knew deep down that I was not going to stop, because I had tried to stop before and didn't. I didn't want to seek help. I didn't even want to stop drinking, but I had to. I was killing myself slowly but surely. I drove home thinking about Diamond. I need help, but what am I going to do? I remember her talking about AA. I can't shake this by myself. So as soon as I woke up on 12-02-00 at 2 p.m., without thinking I picked up the phone. And dialed 911

911: Is this an Emergency.

Me: I need help I can't stop drinking.

911: Hang up the phone and call 411, ask for Alcoholics Anonymous.

Me: Hi. I need the number to Alcoholics Anonymous, please.

Without hesitation, I called.

AA: Hello. AA. How can I help you?

Me: I can't stop drinking.

AA: Okay where are you?

Me: My home in Miami. I don't know how this works.

AA: Well, you go to a meeting.

Me: Do you have any gay meetings?

AA: Yes, we do. There is one on Biscayne Boulevard called Lambda.

I quickly wrote down the directions.

Me: How much does this cost?

AA: Nothing. There are no dues or fees; you just have to be willing to hear the message and have the desire to stop drinking.

Me: Is it religious?

I cringed thinking about being preached at.

AA: No, this is a spiritual program. Religion is optional. This is not a religious organization; this is AA. We are alcoholics helping other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

Me: What time is the next meeting?

AA: 5:45 p.m.

Me: Okay. I'll be there. Thank you.

AA: Good luck.

I took a shower and tried to get myself together. I didn't want to go, but I was so afraid. I knew I had absolutely no other options, I was going to hell fast. I needed help, and so I went.

I sat there fidgeting in my chair staring at the table in front of me, I took a notebook and a pen, thinking I would take notes. Maybe I would hear something that would help

me to stop drinking or at least help me to slow down. I was so scared. Deep in thought, I was approached by a woman who took the liberty of sitting next to me.

Bonnie: Hi. I am Bonnie. Haven't seen you here before.

Me: I am Christine. It's my first time here.

Bonnie: What room do you usually go to?

Me: No, I mean I have never been to AA before.

Bonnie: Well, there is a first time for everything. People are nice here.

I heard a bell ring. The speaker started the meeting.

Speaker: Is there anyone here for their first time?

I raised my hand and said my name. The people in the audience clapped.

Speaker: Stay after the meeting and get to know us.

I expected them to teach me how to drink sensibly, socially, responsibly. I

had my pen and paper ready for his suggestions. He told the story of his

drinking days what his life was like out there and then what it was like

today. He went on to say, "You can't get drunk if you don't pick up the first

drink" Oh my God AA is a program of abstaining

from alcohol all together. Never again would I be able to pick up a drink.

How is that possible after 16 years. I can't go through with this, I could

never just stop drinking. I started to click the pen that was in my hand,

Bonnie reached over and stopped my hand, I bounced my knee. Tapping my

heel to the floor. I couldn't believe it came to this. At the end of the

meeting, they closed by forming a circle holding hands, The speaker said

"can we have a moment of silence for the sick and suffering that will no

longer enter the rooms

of AA" at that moment I felt this surge of electricity go through me. God

was letting me know I was the one he was talking about.

In the next meeting I listened. And at the end of the meeting they handed

out poker chips. A man said that the chip system was just a reminder that

we are gambling with our lives, and would anyone like to pick up a white

chip to join their way of life just for today. I would not stand up. He put it

on the table and said, "I'll leave it here in case there is anyone here who is

shy." I kept my eye on that chip, and when the meeting was over, I grabbed

it when no one was looking and put it in my pocket. I held onto it for dear

life.

~O~

Three days into my sobriety I started shaking out of control. I felt sick

though it was different this time, I felt hot then cold then hot again. I called

a friend who helped talk me through this rough time. I had to skip a few

meetings while I was going through this period. I didn't go anywhere I

stayed at home and dealt with this. I had a head ache for a couple of weeks

at first it was like a migraine, then dizziness, then just a dull head ache. I

thought this would be easy but then the desire to drink came back.

Cary: Hello?

Me: Hey it's me. I am going through it. I don't know what to do. I need a

drink. I am like, freaking out. I'm in pain. I don't know what to do. I need a drink. I don't know if I can do this.

Cary: Call one of the people from the room. Call them. That's what they're there for. Christine, call. ... Promise me you will call when we hang up.

Me: Okay, I will.

I reached into my pocket and pulled out a number of a woman named Dawn whom I met in the room. She said that I could call her if things got bad. I could barely speak. The tears were rolling down my face and soaking my clothes. I was sweating and hurting.

Me: I need a drink. I can't stop shaking.

Dawn: I will go and pick you up! Where are you?

I paused.

Me: I just need you to talk to me.

Dawn: You don't have to go through this alone. I will come and get you. We can ride out the storm together.

I wasn't used to a stranger being willing to do anything for me. Why would she leave work to come to my aid? I thought she was an unusual case, but I found that most of the people were willing to be of service like that.

After all of the shaking and head aches I reentered the rooms. I would listen to the people in the room talking about all of the love they have received once they joined AA. I thought that it was all exaggeration. I saw people that had years without a drink. I would look at them and hear their story, thinking, how could that person ever understand where I have been? But they did. I was feeling the same way they felt when they first stopped drinking.

~O~

They told me that I needed to trust in a higher power. Are they kidding? God let me down! When I cried out to Him, He did nothing to save me! He doesn't love me. He doesn't care about me. But I was wrong, I was only a month sober before I experienced a miracle. I was going to work, talking to myself as I always did. I was talking about how I had been asleep and had lost many years of my life, and how I was never going to get them back. I regretted the past. I felt remorse and pain for my lost youth. I was on my way to dance, and for some reason I wanted to drink like never before, with a passion, with a desperate need, and I knew for the first time that I couldn't. I absolutely couldn't pick up a drink. Oh, my God, I need money. I have bills due. It's Friday night. No other night during the week is like this night. I was scared for the first time to be faced with alcohol.

"God, just get me thought the night, just tonight without drinking," I thought my words, as they'd always seemed to, were just going into the air. God wasn't going to answer my prayers. Why would he? He hasn't before, I thought to myself as I carried my bag back into the dressing room with me to turn Christine into Shannon, the dancer.

Sheila: Hey, Shannon, there's a guy out here who says he wants to talk to you.

Me: Not now I have to get dressed

Still thinking about the night and fearing the hours I would face with alcohol, I thought I might have to leave. I had already started thinking of

the lies I would tell my boss if I had to make a quick exit. I was surely going to leave if it were between me and that drink. I was not going to go through detox again.

Sheila: Shannon, this guy says he has something for you, it's important.

Me: Okay, okay.

I threw on a dress and some lipstick and my high-heeled boots, then went to see what he had for me. I thought maybe jewelry or money, and being the curious creature that I am I rushed to find the goodies.

Me: Okay, Sheila where? What guy?

She pointed to a customer I had met the night before.

Me: My friend told me you had something for me.

Customer: Yes, I do. I was thinking about you and came right over.

He handed me big, manila envelope. Inside was a red book that contained the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. I was taken back.

Then, in the company of this book, was another book called "Sermon On The Mount." How did he know? My God I can't believe it. Never in my years of dancing or bartending had anyone ever given me literature of any kind pertaining to religion or self-help, and surely never something about recovery.

Me: Why did you give these to me?

Customer: I was in AA, and I thought that maybe you could benefit from these books. You mentioned that you stopped drinking.

**Me: Thank you, thank you, thank you. (I smiled as I walked away.) ...
God.**

The rest of the night was a breeze, because I knew that God knew that I was doing my best. But why did He answer my prayers of being sober but not the others in my life?