

## Christina's Story

### "Learning To Embrace Grace"... My personal journey from fear to faith

I'm Christina Grace Kunkle and my story is one that I'm sure many of you can relate to in some way, because no matter who we are and where we come from, life seems to naturally provide many challenging highs and lows to learn from on our journeys.

When people meet me as I am today, they will say "you always seem so happy and confident, like your life is so easy...is that for real?" I say "Yes, it is real now, but it hasn't always been that way. I definitely didn't have your typical silver spoon, and I'm happy to share my story with you if you're open to hearing it."

I was born the last of 5 children to hard working busy parents who were both nurses. My father served as a medic in the Korean War, and was a Nurse Anesthetist in the Air Force but was discharged early after suffering Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. His struggle for emotional stability made it difficult to stay in one place very long. As a family we packed up and moved 19 times. That's 19 different homes, schools, communities, churches, and sets of friends. Although I do feel his intentions were good and recall many times he showed love, he had an unpredictable temper, leaving us all a bit unsettled as to what would happen next.

My mom worked nightshift as a nurse, and sacrificed quite a lot to be available and provide stability. I know she didn't get much rest, and was always working very hard to manage her own emotions and still be strong for her kids. Despite always having a smile on her face and acting like everything was OK, the knot that stayed in my stomach told me there was something terribly wrong. Without a spirit of harmony or predictability, I felt fearful, stressed, and insecure. I lived in the "fight or flight" mode which over time became my comfort zone.

Being an extremely intuitive and sensitive child, I took it upon myself to make her load lighter, to encourage her, and to do what I could to "fix" things. I realize now it was my attempt to find my place, to fit in and create a sense of security that I longed for. The "caretaker" within me began to focus on taking care of and tuning into the needs of others in order to survive. In many ways my strong yet codependent mom and I simultaneously did our best to tackle the task of growing up emotionally.

With hindsight being 20/20, it's amazingly clear that this is when I developed a perfectionist mentality, thinking if I could just be the perfect child, everything would be O.K. I tried to be the kid who never needed anything or made any waves. A straight "A" student, I poured my energy into getting positive attention.

Knowing that I was in need of positive role models and a more stable environment, I agreed with my mom at age 14 to attend a Christian boarding school, but found it difficult to adjust. I wanted to feel accepted and like I belonged there, but just felt out of step and on the sidelines. I compared myself to other girls, wanting to be pretty, to fit in...but with an athletic build, it seemed I could never measure up to how those girls

looked in “Teen magazine”. Somehow I decided that the key to being good enough was doing whatever it took to look like those girls so I just stopped eating...being skinny was my total focus. I thought if I could just get thin enough then everything would be perfect.

Instead of finding the happiness I wanted, I found myself in the self-destructive grip of anorexia and bulimia, which started out as a best friend but quickly became my worst enemy. Over time I withdrew more and more into my shameful secret and became defensive towards anyone who suggested I might have a problem. It was the beginning of a long fight for my life. It’s true that our emotions affect our physical health, and at that time my immune system was battered...resulting in frequent colds, sinus infections and fatigue. I recall even having symptoms of emotional and physical “burn out” earlier than this. (Years later, lacking the emotional hardiness of a resilient mindset, due to long term stress I experienced sore and swollen joints, symptoms of latex allergy, Lyme’s Disease, and 4 miscarriages...You can understand why I say my attempts to be “perfect” just about killed me.)

I took high school in three years, and chose to become a Registered Nurse because it was so familiar, I could help others, and would be able to support myself right away after graduating. I excelled, graduating with honors, but still felt very empty. I see now that I was living in the law of scarcity and fear, feeling like there was never enough, that I was never enough, and felt powerless to change my circumstances.

These experiences were valuable, in that they provided me a long list of what I didn’t want, and what didn’t work to bring me happiness. I set out looking for a way to find what did make me happy and create new circumstances but I didn’t know how. I knew where I was, and saw what I wanted to be, but kept getting stuck not knowing HOW to get there...

This led me to a lot of trial and error, taking on a painfully co-dependent role in my first marriage with someone I wanted to “help” and “change” but that didn’t work out so well and was divorced at 25. Through the process of divorce everything fell apart for me. So many times I just felt like giving up. I’ll never forget the night I was flipping through the yellow pages, with tears streaming down my face as I prayed to be guided to someone that could help me move forward. It was a “down on my knees” moment when I realized I could not do this by myself, and the first time I opened myself up to admit it. I was about to receive the gift of Synergy.

My prayers were answered, as I was led to a wonderful and brilliant mentor who for three years helped me take one step at a time past my pain. Willpower and persistence had gotten me this far, and now it was time to take an honest look at what wasn’t working in my life, beginning with my negative self-talk and the beliefs I held about not being good enough. This was undermining my self confidence, preventing me from trusting myself or anyone else, much less that there really was a loving God. I also realized I had taken responsibility for many things that were not mine, and needed to learn how to set boundaries and not take everything so personally.

I committed to Adult Children Of Alcoholics meetings, and became open to allowing others to support me as I began to create a happy, healthy future. This is where I developed my absolute faith that there is a loving power greater than me, which has my best interests at heart, and is always there for guidance if I just ask. I share this, because it is why I feel so excited about helping others realize that they too can achieve the happy life they dream of. If I can do it, anyone can. It's a bumpy road at times, but well worth the work you put into really enjoying life.

I finally found out "HOW to get there" and this is why I am so passionate about sharing with you what has helped me to go from barely surviving to truly happy and thriving. Each of us has a different set of tough experiences, but there are common threads that run throughout the process of making lasting changes forward. What has worked for me is finding healthy mentors, seeking serenity, and building bounce-back resilience.

I am happy to say that I now love and accept who I truly am, have been able to throw perfection out the window and choose to celebrate progress, rewarding myself for each step forward towards my best life. I enjoy a wonderful marriage to my husband of 17 years, Garth, and together we have two beautiful children Ben 15, and Dani-Grace, 6 who are growing up happy, healthy, and strong.

My extreme sensitivity and intuitive nature that I often considered a painful curse is now something I can embrace as my greatest gift. It's my greatest desire to have it help you. In addition to deep compassion, my experiences have given me a wonderful set of resources that can help cut your learning curve, offer hope and support, and an outstretched hand of friendship along your journey.

If you find yourself wanting more for yourself but aren't sure how to get there, I would be honored to be even a small part of you moving forward. I stand ready and willing with tips, tools and encouragement as you to embrace new ways of creating the wonderful life you dream of!

Synergy is created when you have a partner walking beside you. It's powerful momentum forward towards your goals, allowing you to reach them faster than you would have on your own.

Remember, SYNERGY = SHORTCUT...If you want to walk fast, walk alone. If you want to walk far, walk together. (Indian Proverb)

Take a moment to consider this... Is NOW YOUR time to accept the gift of Synergy?

If so, know that my hand is outstretched to you, I'm just a call or Email away.

Believing in YOU,

Christina