

# SEDUCED

## my true life story

### SOMEONE BLEW UP MY HEART

By Christine Leahy

My mom and dad were young when they had my sister and I just a year apart. When finances got tight, my biological father decided he should leave the 3 of us and move to Georgia to look for work in construction. While my dad was away, he met a woman and got her pregnant. He had a son, and so I had a brother. And all of a sudden, I wasn't the youngest anymore. While my parents tried to figure out the mess they had made out of their lives, I watched as my mom got angrier and more devastated, and as my dad got drunk and became more unavailable. My dad made holes in walls with his fist and my mom cried more tears than I had ever seen her cry. They tried to reconcile, but couldn't. He left a second time. This time, he didn't come back. He took his poker chips and the bank account and left us. Suddenly, my mom was left to pay the mortgage, the heating bills, and for food. She clung to governmental assistance for a while until she found a way out on her own.

I don't know whose idea it was, but for some reason when my dad left me so did his whole side of his family - my grandmother and grandfather, aunt and uncle, two cousins, even my baby brother Gene. It's a funny thing that just a couple of years later my dad would be replaced along with the rest of my family. So the year I turned 8, I got birthday cards that no longer said "Love, Grandma and Grandpa Carr (my dad's parents). My cards read "Love, Grandma and Grandpa Neal". Just like that, I was no longer a member of the Carr family.

Shortly after my mom married my step dad, we moved to Charlotte, NC. This new life was a world of guns and objectification. Between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade, I pretty much kept to myself. I was quiet and shy with a knack for getting good grades. At the same time I was personifying success, I was also suffering on the inside.

Within the walls of my junior high, I saw drugs being sold on my bus, fights break out in front of me where a female student stabbed another female student in the neck with a fork - we switched to plasticware after that. I even watched a young 7<sup>th</sup> grader take orders for guns in my Geometry class. I was touched inappropriately, and it was a well-known fact that wearing a skirt to school was "asking for it". When my mom, sister and I complained about it to school administrators, we were given a simple solution...don't wear *that* to school. I'm gonna be honest, I was a conservative dresser back in the day. I couldn't afford any trendy, name brand clothes, and my

sister and I weren't allowed to wear makeup. That's when I learned that boys would not be held accountable for their actions.

In high school, it was more of the same. There were riots, see through book bags, and metal detectors at every away football game. One morning, as my sister and I walked towards our 1<sup>st</sup> period class, I noticed two boys talking behind a building. When you're quiet like I was, you notice things that no one else thinks matters. I noticed those boys about 3 minutes before one of them shot the other in the head.

At home, my quiet side was considered "questionable behavior". My mom would hint that she thought I was depressed. There was a mental health facility nearby called Charter Pines Hospital, and on the weekends they placed an ad in the newspaper. Along with the ad, they had a screening tool that asked questions like, "Do you feel sad for long periods of time?" I never got help while I was in junior high or high school, but I think the signs were there that I was dying on the inside.

At least 10 years had past and I still hadn't heard from my dad or grandparents or anyone else on that side of my family. Many birthdays and Christmases passed without a phone call, a birthday card or a Christmas gift. I tried not to talk about my dad at home. I just knew it wasn't what you were supposed to talk about. It was like, "Come on, God gave you a new family, why waste your time thinking of a previous life of pain." I suppose that made sense to them. We did hear about my dad once, but never from him.

One day, I answered the phone when a woman on the other end asked to talk to my mom. It was my little brother Gene's mom. You know, the woman my dad left my mom, my sister and I to be with. She was calling from the hospital where she was recovering from my dad's love, if you know what I mean. While I wasn't getting birthday cards, my mom wasn't getting her child support payments, either. The courts would contact us periodically to ask if we knew of his whereabouts, and my mom always had the same answer: "We have no idea where he is." I never questioned that.

**"At the same time I was personifying success, I was also suffering on the inside."**

## MY SECRET LIFE

I convinced myself that I could re-invent my image. Be someone who looks happy on the outside so no one will question how unhappy I was on the inside.

When I got to college, I found out it was a breeding ground for mistakes. I can't even tell you how I lost my strong sense of self. I just know it faded back then. I lost my virginity to my first boyfriend in college. If you asked me today how we met, I don't remember. Or why we even dated. I just couldn't tell you. I lost the most special part of me and I can't even remember why. Everything that my heart needed was missing. It was like I had borrowed from a man's attention to pay off my need for love. The same boy that I gave myself to freely, later he turned around and took what he wanted from me forcibly. After it was over, I looked down at my hands and saw the impressions my fingernails had made in my palms. Without saying a word, I got in my car and drove back to my dorm room. I thought I didn't have a right to tell someone "no" after I had said "yes" to them before. For two years, I kept that belief a secret.

All of my issues, with a dad who left me, a controlling mother, and a sister who was unrelatable, had to be talked about. Clearly, yelling and slamming doors, as I was accustomed to doing, just wasn't resolving any of my issues. I started to see a therapist who helped me release some of the steam that was building up in my heart, ready to explode. I even accepted an invitation to come to the altar and lay down all of my sins and accept Jesus into my heart. I remember walking down the aisle and sitting on the steps, sobbing. But I also remember walking home from there to the same horrible life.

For years, I lived a secret life. I was diagnosed with Depression and Anxiety Disorder. Then I began dating a man who was divorced with 2 kids, aged 7 and 9. He was this thing I'd never heard of, a non-denominational Christian. He also introduced me to Penthouse Letters and pornography. Then I got pregnant. I was terrified. I had no one to turn to. How do I explain a pregnancy to my new friends and family when I was still hiding the fact that I was dating this man? It was January. As irony goes, I chose to have my abortion on the anniversary of the famous Supreme Court abortion rights decision known as Roe v. Wade.

After the procedure was over, I had to leave the clinic through the back door so I wouldn't be attacked by the protestors lined up out front. Or filmed by the TV crew doing a news piece on the anniversary of that landmark case. Later that day, in a lonely hotel room, I pulled myself together just enough to call and

wish my sister a happy birthday. This "choice" was the worst decision I had ever made. I never told my family about it, and didn't tell the baby's father until a year later. Today, this choice still haunts me. It left me a shell of myself and I was never the same again. The darkness that comes over you in times like these is known to many of you, but rarely talked about. When I couldn't get out of bed, when being awake was like watching a movie in slow motion in the absence of color, I knew I was in a world of true despair. I quickly found out driving my Honda through the country roads was like holding a loaded weapon to my head. I couldn't stop thinking what would it feel like to run this car into that tree, into this ditch, or into that other car?

In time, that fog lifted. But I could feel that it hadn't gone far.

## BEING A SERIAL DATER

That's about when I discovered the world of online dating. Back then, it was all new. So new that there weren't any commercials on TV yet, and you didn't dare tell anyone else you were doing it because it wasn't accepted as a "normal" way of meeting men. I prepared the pictures and my profile, and within hours my overwhelming need to be noticed and wanted was met. I rolled through my dating choices like I was shopping for shoes in a store catalog. I soon found a man who lived on the Gulf coast about 2 hours from me. We met at a hotel. If you aren't gasping about that risky decision, you should be. I felt smart enough and bold enough to take chances like these. In reality, I was acting like an arrogant fool.

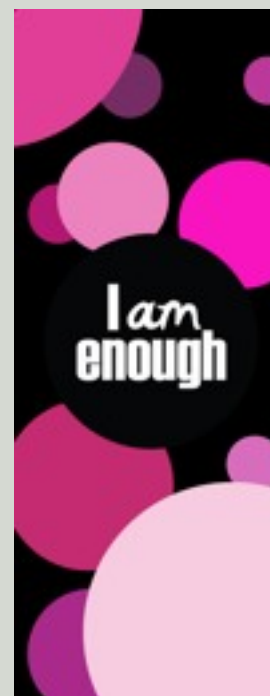
I moved into his apartment in June, after we had been dating long distance for about a year. It was only a short time later that things started to go from bad to worse. I started noticing the signs of abuse, but told myself that it wasn't that bad, that I could handle it. I think I couldn't allow myself - someone who had put herself through college, got a masters degree and was a month away from starting her doctorate - to believe that I had fallen for the worst kind of man.

But nevertheless, the evidence of his abuse continued to surface. His fist would put holes in the walls; the ironing board was thrown through the apartment; and he would yell at me about nothing. Even when I was in the car with him, I couldn't look out my passenger side window without being accused of flirting with the men driving in cars along side of us. Of course, I was told I was too fat when I was really too skinny. In fact, a coworker had told me that she could see my hip bones through my suit skirt. At home in our apartment, I never left our bedroom. He worked from our home in the other bedroom. When he got the urge, he would turn to Internet porn. I had to take sleeping pills just to fall asleep beside

him every night. I was in a bad place and couldn't find anyone to help me. And I certainly didn't know how to help myself.

God sporadically showed up in my life back then. But then again, I wasn't really looking for him. Until one day, when I just couldn't ignore the presence of God in my life any longer. That day, my boyfriend was working out at the gym. This was a time I usually left the bedroom and went into his office to check my email. I logged onto AOL. It said "Christine, You've Got Mail" but when I opened the email box, I noticed it contained all of his emails. The emails were from dating sites, and so I learned that there were many other women in his life. Then, I heard a voice tell me to pull a single manila file folder from a stack. When I looked inside, I noticed there were drugs rolled up in aluminum foil.

When I knew he would be away, I gathered my things and my nerves and drove down I-75 in a Florida downpour to find a new place to live. After the rain stopped, I saw a rainbow. I reached over to the radio, turned the dial and tuned into a Christian radio station for the 1<sup>st</sup> time in my life. And I started to listen to God. I drove until I reached Sand Key Beach, about an hour from where we lived. The same beach I went to as a kid. I walked the same stretch of sand I used to until I got to the rocks. I remember standing there, watching the water give and take away the sand. I was lonely, afraid, embarrassed, ashamed. But most of all, I was mad at God. I wanted to know what I had done to deserve all of this. I took a picture of those rocks because I thought they were beautiful, and because this place reminded me of a time when I was living an ordinary life, a good life, at a time when I was innocent. Before I messed up my life.



# SAVING SAND DOLLARS

## and never giving up on yourself.



**“I believed I had a shelf life, an expiration date”**

But lessons learned are sometimes easily forgotten. I kept seeking to be noticed by turning to more Internet dating sites, when what I really wanted was to be known. I was convinced that if anyone knew everything about me, and all that I had done, they wouldn't love me. I didn't love me. I believed I had a shelf life, an expiration date. You know, that at some point anyone who I loved would grow tired of me. Their love for me would expire. Just like my dad's love for me.

But my soul was hungry. I would show up at church all alone, watching the other young people, souls seemingly filled, smiling and hugging each other as they met and sat together. I didn't have anyone to hug me or to sit with me. I longed for that connection, that intimacy. I did, however, have 4 dates in one weekend. I called it the “Sex in the City” life.

Looking back, what felt like an all-at-once transformation was really me running in circles around a track with no finish line until one day I decided to stop. That day was actually one morning. I had just spent the night with a man who I really didn't know very well. My alarm went off, and as I jumped out of bed, I looked at him and asked him if he was getting up. He looked at the alarm clock, then he looked at me and said, “I can't put my feet on the ground until the clock reads an even number.” That was it. I was done.

After that, I went to Mass each evening at a church downtown that served the folks putting in long hours at work. I sat in the back at first. Like dipping your toe in the pool to test the water. Finally, I

decided to try this confession thing. I went into the box, knelt down and confessed my sins to a priest, a total stranger. I cried. I was ashamed. He spoke gentle words to me and then said “Say 4 Hail Mary's and your sins will be forgiven” Wow! Not that bad! Actually, the point here is that I confessed my sins out loud for the first time. I had no one else to tell. My family and I had a long history of strained relationships and running from God. But recently, I had been thinking about my biological father. What had he been doing all these years? Had he stopped drinking? Was he sorry for what he had done? Was he even alive?

Years earlier, I searched and found his phone number online. Actually, I found 3 numbers with his name. I printed them all out and kept them on my desk. But I didn't call them. For four long years.

Then, in the 4th year, I called those numbers in May. The first person I called answered the phone and said he wasn't my dad. I had forgotten that my grandfather's name was the same. Even though he hung up the phone without telling me, I suddenly realized that I had just spoken to my grandpa for the first time in 23 years. But I didn't call him back, and he didn't call me. The second number was an answering machine. I hung up after I heard a young boy's voice on the recorded greeting. My dad couldn't have children that age. Gene would be in his 20s by now. The third number was disconnected. A week later, a woman called me and left a message.

She said she was my dad's wife. She figured out who I was and said she had been looking for me!

It would take me 4 months and several conversations with her to finally agree to meet with my estranged dad. It had been 23 years and 4 months since I'd seen or talked to him. On the big day, I was leaving my apartment just as the elevator doors on my floor opened and he emerged. He was smaller than I had remembered him. He was shy. Neither one of us really knew what to say to each other. They only stayed for 2 days before returning home to Atlanta. But in that time, I could feel years of pain finding a place to heal in my heart.

As God would have it, I met my husband just about a month later. Did you know he was from Atlanta, too?

Much has changed in the last few years. I gave my biological dad a card for Father's Day that I delivered in person for the very first time. I met my two half sisters, and I even saw Gene again. I spent time with my grandfather on his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, and I got birthday cards that read “Love, Grandma and Grandpa Carr”.

## About Christine

Christine Leahy is the founder and CEO of Women Stand Up! International, a non-profit organization of women dedicated to helping other women in crisis. WSU! International is healing the broken-hearted through mentoring and empowerment. Christine wants every woman to know that they are loved, that they are enough.

## Ways to Get Involved

- Become a Women Stand Up! International Ambassador
- Coordinate an I Am Enough 5K fundraiser walk on your campus!
- Donate to the I Am Enough cause
- Volunteer your time to support our international projects that help women in crisis.

## CONTACT US

### Women Stand Up!

Website: [www.womenstandup.net](http://www.womenstandup.net)

Email: [ccleahy@womenstandup.net](mailto:ccleahy@womenstandup.net)

# FINDING STRENGTH

1

I needed to realize that God does in fact love me, in spite of the incredible mess I may have made of my life.

*"For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."  
-John 3:16*

2

No matter how hard I tried there was nothing I could do to earn or merit a relationship with God. My mess, also known as sin, caused me to fall short of God's perfect standard.

*"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...The wages of sin is death."--Romans 3:23; 6:23*

3

This is the most amazing part. God doesn't say, "Clean up your mess and I'll accept you and love you." No, he demonstrated his love for us by personally cleaning up the problem of sin. He sent His Son to die for it--on a cross. And, he proved He could beat death by rising from the dead 3 days later (commonly called the resurrection).

*"But God demonstrates his own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."--Romans 5:8*

*"I passed on to you what was of first importance; that Christ died for our sins, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day..."--I Corinthians 15:3-4*

4

The application point: I can't earn or merit God's favor by my own performance, but instead I simply need to place my trust in Jesus Christ to forgive me for my mess--my sins.

*"But to as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" --John 1:12*

## I'M STILL STANDING

Now, as a woman thinking back on that 8 year-old girl who made a deal with God, I can tell you what I would say to Him if I was standing alongside Him on that beach today. "God, I'm here. Still. I have taken the blows and accepted the humiliation of my troubled past. But I need to know. God, are you proud of me? Did I shoulder the burden for someone you love? Are you proud of me, God? Did you see me, did you watch me, did you notice me? Are you proud of me, God? I never gave up. You never gave up. I'm proud of me, God."

I always wondered why I could find those beautiful and delicate sand dollars at the end of the beach among those rocks... why the most fragile of all shells could be found after making it to shore and avoid breaking against the rocks? It just didn't make sense to me. Until I finally realized the most beautiful are the most beautiful because they survived the rocks.

I know now how I survived the rocks.

## FINDING FREEDOM

All the counselors I've ever seen for my past depression, anxiety, family issues, abuse, and abandonment agree that addressing the spiritual area of a person's life is an incredibly important part of recovery and living a healthy, balanced life. We've been created to live in relationship with one another, not in isolation. I was afraid of true and authentic relationships because I feared if someone got too close they would find out I was un-lovable. But that lie has been rooted out of my heart and mind, and replaced instead with the truth about me and about God. Let me explain what I mean.

(Please read the 4 points to the left)

These four points aren't really that complicated? Profound, yet simple. I invite you to read them, and ponder what they are offering. I'd be remiss not to invite you to make the best decision of your life. The same decision I made several years ago that put me on a course to experience what I believe God created me for - among them, to experience real intimacy in relationships with God and others.

To open yourself up to having a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, the following is a suggested prayer. Prayer is simply talking with God. The words aren't important; however, the attitude of your heart is. I've included a prayer below that you may find helpful in trying to express your heart attitude toward God.

*"Lord Jesus, I need you. Thank you for demonstrating your love by dying on a cross to pay for my mess--my sins. Thank you for forgiving my sins and offering me eternal life. I now place my trust in You and ask You to make me into the person you created me to be. Amen."*

Yes, freedom, contentment and fulfillment are available to you for the asking. And, if you are willing to do some work in moving toward relationship - with God and others - you can experience a new life. A life that the seduction of our culture could never deliver, a life for which you were created.

Will you choose that life now?

## CHRISTINE LEAHY & WOMEN STAND UP INTERNATIONAL

For me, that new life meant moving on and trusting God with my significant relationships, including with Michael, my husband. Where once I failed miserably, I ventured back into the deep waters of relational intimacy and got married. It was scary, but this time I had my eyes fixed on Jesus. When Michael and I married, we both made a commitment to put God at the center of our relationship. And I haven't regretted it once.

After spending the last four years serving in the Army in our nation's capitol, Michael and I returned to our home, Atlanta, GA. And I've started an organization called Women Stand Up! International. Our battle cry is "women helping women in crisis" and our goal is to help empower women all over the world.

You see, I believe that God holds a special place in His heart for ALL women, including those in distress, abuse survivors, the widows and the poor - any woman facing a crisis, like I have many times throughout my life.

So won't you join me and a growing army of women across the globe who are working hard to restore dignity and honor to women everywhere. We need your talents, your gifts. After all, you are enough to make a difference in the world. Won't you join us.



**Christine Leahy, founder and CEO, Women Stand Up, Int'l**