

# Crissy

It seems that in every group of teens since the beginning of time, there's one girl who gets all the attention. She usually is extremely pretty, has lots of friends, gets along well with the guys and is consistently the center of conversation. They are constantly envied by other girls, while guys work hard to get their attention. This was the life of Crissy, the girl who had it all and who barely escaped with her life.

I met Crissy when she was in my Sophomore English class before I became a counselor. She not only had all the above qualities, but she was smart, intuitive and serious about her grades. What was most remarkable was that even though she frequently would miss class, she always produced excellent work getting assignments in on time.

She stopped by my counseling office during her junior year to discuss her credits. She was behind one semester due to some "health" issues but wanted to make sure that she graduated on time. Before long, Crissy became a "regular", usually stopping by every Monday where she would share small moments in her life. Initially, she was very private, but eventually she found the courage to tell a story that had to be told.

Crissy was thrown out of her home when she was twelve, abandoned at a substandard apartment unit and told by her parents to find a way to survive. She wandered around the unit for days, shivering outside at night while creating conversations with anyone who seemed to care. Eventually, the wrong guy said that she could live in his place. He was in his forties, a dealer and would eventually get Crissy hooked on cocaine while becoming his "girlfriend".

But no one was there to rescue Crissy. Her parents had simply walked away. School was her safe place, but then again, she never asked for help. She was always afraid that she would be arrested because she sold and took drugs. So, because she was smart, she played the part of the successful student with a perfect life. She had lots of clothes, tons of attention, but no real friends. And she was an abused minor living with a felon. Crissy felt like she couldn't let anyone into her life.

Because she also was in a survival mode, she kept her secrets close to her. She didn't have a social life even though everyone presumed that she did. No one really knew where she lived. Crissy would mention her older "boyfriend", but no one had met him. In fact, no one suspected that this "perfect" girl didn't have it all.

Somehow, Crissy was able to fool everyone until she overdosed in the middle of her junior year. Apparently, she "died" but was revived. Because of the circumstances, which involved her attempted suicide, she was hospitalized for several weeks in the mental care unit. Subsequently, she missed a good part of her classes and was at risk

to graduate. Since she was ranked first in her class, she was devastated that she would lose her class ranking and her chance to go to the university. Crissy knew that it was her only way out.

Crissy had just turned 18 when she was released from the hospital unit and returned to school. She knew that she would have to find some type of support if she wanted to graduate and save her ranking. She finally confessed her entire story, including her parents' abandonment, the pedophile who abused her, and her addiction to cocaine. She left her "boyfriend" and found a cousin that would let her stay at her place. Crissy would need to complete all credits by attending classes both during the day and attend full time at our night school.

She signed up to work each day at the counseling office as an aide. Here, she had support from several staff members who eventually became her extended family. We saw her go through withdrawal multiple times including, sweats, shaking, seemingly incoherent, but she hung in there every day and never gave up.

By the end of the year, Crissy had made all A's in both schools and maintained her position as first in her class. The scholarship that was presented to her gave her a full ride in tuition, included the option of staying in a dorm and even provided her with a part-time job. She was on her way.

Crissy eventually received her degree in clinical psychology and worked with young women who were suffering from abuse, chemical dependency, and mental health issues. Today she is happily married and committed to her three children. She still suffers from extreme anxiety from her past drug use and abuse. Crissy is committed to staying healthy within a tough exercise program, ongoing therapy and a nutritious diet, while trying to be the supportive mom whom she never had.

Crissy also invests her time and support to help her recently discovered parents as they face their own aging and financial issues. They continue to challenge her and are in complete denial about abandoning their daughter claiming that she simply ran away. Somehow, she has found a way to forgive them.

**Your thoughts: (no names or places)**

**Have you even known someone who played the part of a certain person but was actually lived a very different life?**

**What do you think was unique about Crissy?**

**At one point, Crissy is described as a “survivor”. What does that term mean in relationship to her life?**

**In MPOWRD groups, teens often get the chance to tell their stories. Why is it important to have a safe place to share some of our tough times with a group?**

**If Crissy were a friend of yours, and she shared some of her problems, what would you say to her? Could you have possibly helped her to find help?**