



**HEAL YOUR
SH!T
FIND YOUR
HAPPY**

**Get Into Your Body
Break the Cycle
of Generational Trauma**

CHRISTINE VARNAVAS

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FIND YOUR
HAPPY**

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Heal Your Sh!t Find Your Happy

Get Into Your Body Break the Cycle of Generational Trauma

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Foreword

According to the National Council on Behavioral Health, 70% of adults in the United States have experienced trauma at least once in their lifetime that is 223.4 million people. *Heal Your Sh!t Find Your Happy: Get Into Your Body Break the Cycle of Generational Trauma* is a must read book based on Christine's own lived experiences of trauma, unrealized generational trauma, and epigenetic and scientific research.

As someone who had a front-row seat to much of Christine's story, I found myself transfixed to the pages. Christine's story is one that not only informs the mind but also the heart. It is an amazing book to keep close to you, to return to repeatedly, whether you are healing or, like I am, in the profession of helping others to heal, this book is for you.

Dr. Amy Schlieve

SCHLIEVE CONSULTING

Introduction

Let me start by saying... thank you! First to my mom and my two amazing daughters who have taught me so much. I love you.

Secondly, to all the amazing beings who have been with me on this wicked wonderful journey of self-discovery, healing, moving, laughing, face-planting, getting back up again, learning how things work and more. You've been with me through re-inventing myself (many times), two marriages, two divorces, two child births, two miscarriages, a car accident, knee surgeries, my first attempt at college, college and graduate school, many fitness and yoga certifications, hangovers, countless beautiful vacations to Greece, and much, much more. You've been there all along and I'm so grateful. I love you all!

I'm writing this to offer hope, healing, and as a call to action for women to heal your shit now so you can stop the chain of pain for future generations.

This is dedicated to all adult women who are sexual assault survivors. For those of you out there who keep

going and pushing through your stress mess even when you feel like you can't breathe. For those who got up on days when you didn't think you could, had children when you didn't think you could or should, were brave enough to face accusers head on, regardless of the outcome. For those who have lived through childhood trauma, who constantly second guess themselves, who belong to the "What's Wrong With Me? Club", who've yelled at people they love or over reacted so hard it caused them to wonder if they were losing their mind, and simultaneously didn't understand why they acted that way.

And for those of us who are part of the Shame Club... because of what we did, said, or othered to those we love and then felt like shit for days, months, or years about it.

Healing is the missing key to helping you feel better and to stop the cycle of madness.

If we heal our shit in this lifetime, it minimizes the impact of shit we pass on to the next generation whether it's your children or grandchildren or great great great... you get the picture... We do the work now to help future generations suffer less.

Sounds a little like playing God? Maybe, but if you do the work in this body, in this life, on this planet, at this time, it will have a positive impact on the future and help ease suffering for generations to come.

It doesn't get any bigger than that.

Also, to all the moms or other adult figures who love someone who's been hurt as a child, a few key things: the assault never goes away, it's woven into our being, stored in our bodies and our minds forever, especially if we don't process it out. When the amazing being you love, who has been hurt, reacts out of proportion to the situation, yells, is overwhelmed easily, is depressed or anxious, or on and on and on... PLEASE take a moment to understand what childhood trauma can do to some of us. I say some, because not all of us are affected the same way. In my case, my childhood trauma hijacked my nervous system (my internal processing center... thoughts, feelings, emotions, etc.), which made me think, act, and feel a certain way. I didn't understand it and I'm pretty certain those around me didn't either.

Just please know that understanding how stress and trauma work from a neurophysiological (brain/body) standpoint is an explanation, not an excuse. Explanations are those golden nuggets that can soften gnarly situations. We didn't ask for what happened to us, BUT it is our responsibility to navigate how we show up in this life despite the situation.

I ask that you amplify your curiosity. That will go a long way and be appreciated.

Most of us, unless we are medically trained or have professional training and/or work in the mental health field, are not aware of how trauma works. The word trauma is

becoming more mainstream and I believe we (as a country in the U.S.) are beginning to understand that trauma is not isolated to the battlefield. It is an equal opportunity experience that can and does affect everyone.

The impact that the assault had on me was that it hijacked and preconditioned my **autonomic nervous system** (built-in safety system – fight or flight, rest and digest, freeze and fawn) to be on high alert all the time and default to the fight or flight (protect) response and freeze and fawn. Not the rest and digest response (connect).

The assault was the catalyst to my system, defaulting to a fear-based mode (protect) when life happened as it does. It was the precursor to how I (my nervous system) would react to (manage) stressful situations in the future.

Lastly, be gentle with those you love. They are not trying to be an asshole. No one, at least no one I know, wakes up one morning and says, “I think I’ll be an asshole today,” or “I feel bad, so I’ll make the people around me feel bad too.” Chances are they are overwhelmed and it’s their *trauma drama* that is showing up.

Trauma drama is a phrase I made up when I was trying to explain to my clients how their unresolved childhood trauma can show up in their adult lives. Unprocessed trauma can cause relentless drama for the person who’s carrying it to themselves and those around them.

Healing is work. It doesn't necessarily always have to be hard and painful. But it does require having the right support, the right tools, and a plan to act.

I created a mantra years ago once I started on the healing path. "Do my work. Do good work. Do no harm." It has helped.

The stories I share in this book are not meant to foster a sense of victimhood. They are simply meant to show you a path I chose when at other times choice was not an option.

This is written to offer hope. To show that healing can and does happen. It does not happen overnight. It also does not have to suck all the time. You will cry. You will laugh. You may even have fun.

So let's create an actionable plan for how to live and co-create the world we want to live in. Who's with me?

"Women are emotionally and physically stressed. Look at this culture between the two major genders. Which is the one that's programmed by this particular culture to take care of others emotionally while ignoring their own needs... told to identify with their duties rather than the needs of the self... taught not to be angry, they must repress their anger... made to feel responsible for how other people feel. There's more autoimmune disease among women. The more stress and the more social oppression people experience the greater the risk for these conditions."

~ Gabor Maté, Physician, Addiction Expert, Author

How The Story Came Out & Why Women Don't Tell

the repercussions
and the reality
of telling

Allow me to recall how the story of my sexual assault came out.

From what I remember... I was 16 and a junior in high school. It would have been 1981... maybe. I graduated in 1983 so... The current boy I was in deep lust with was home on leave from the Marines. He was part of a group of boys from "the other high school" I had met with a friend. I don't remember how we met them, but there were three of them. We ended up spending a lot of time together. We drank a lot. It's Wisconsin. We had fun. We hung out at each other's houses... well their houses. Not mine.

I ended up having a "short thing" with one of them, but that ended when I walked in and caught him and my friend going at it on her living room floor. Oh hormones...

One of the others was “the Marine.” He was for all purposes the leader of the pack and I really liked him. I was attracted to his confidence. He drove a cool car, he was fairly good looking, and his family was amazing.

I don’t remember how or why I started spending time with his family but his mother and I clicked right away. I started spending a lot of time with her. She once told me I was the daughter she never had. Well, let’s boost my teen ego a bit. Yes, please, more of this.

His family liked me. They wanted me around. This feeling was so new to me that I felt like I’d won the lottery. His mom, his dad, and his brother all liked me. It was a whole family unit. They wanted me around. It was like a drug. It felt so good.

It felt good to be wanted. Not just by the guys you just sleep with and really secretly like a lot more than they like you because you feel worthless all the time and if they pay attention to you, you might not be the worthless piece of shit you really feel like you are. Yup, that’s a thing!

Translation? They liked me, so I must NOT be a worthless piece of shit. They wanted me around. They invited me to do “family things.”

We spent hours at their house hanging out at the kitchen table playing cards and ultimately they invited me to go “camping” with them. I’d never done that before. I’d never had a family who sat at the kitchen table and who ate a meal together and played cards or who “went camping.”

Our family meals in my house were eating and watching TV or my brother Kevin and I eating a TV dinner together on the floor of the family room and watching TV. There was a lot of TV in my life. I was a kid of the 80s.

Camping for this family was not what I knew as camping. There was no tent. My experience with camping was as a girl scout at Girl Scout camp at camp Adahi in the Tennessee Mountains. We slept in tents on cots. We cooked our food over a fire. We hiked. We rode horses. We did crafts.

Camping to them was driving an hour or so to their "camper," setting up the camper from the last time it was used, emptying the truck with all the stuff that was needed to camp, and then the fun started. Eating, drinking beer, playing cards, and going to the bar to drink more.

I ended up going camping many, many times with this family. I loved it. The mom and dad and I bonded in a way that was probably not very healthy at times looking back. But I loved every minute of it... well almost every minute.

The mom was lovely. She loved me and made a point of telling me all the time. The dad was tall and what I imagined my dad looked like (I met my dad later in life) and I loved him dearly. He'd call me "The Greek" or "kid" or other names that made me feel special, wanted, and cared about.

They both wanted their oldest son and I to be a couple. His mom talked about it a lot in my presence.

I'm pretty sure he, the son, had no idea how deep the relationship between his family and I had gotten. His brother and I were friends. We were closer in age. Both boys were adopted and this family was a very tight unit.

It felt like I was part of something for the first time since I left Tennessee. Part of a family that wanted me around and they had fun. I had fun with them. Keep in mind here that this is not me saying my family did not want me around. That was never part of the equation, it just felt so good to be actively wanted. Notice I've said the word fun here a few times.

When we were camping, we ate together, we sat at the fire at night listening to music, drinking a lot of beer, listening to country music, laughing, and talking about their son, the Marine, who was away.

When I wasn't camping with them, I often spent time at their house, sitting in the kitchen, eating, talking, and sharing news from letters from their son who was far far away in California. The world seemed like a much bigger place back then.

I laugh now, at "far far away" because this was a pre-internet world; a pre-e-mail world. We were still writing letters. It feels like forever ago.

So that's who he was and why the "how I told my mom" story is such a big deal. Their son was home on leave when the story officially came out. His being home on leave was a huge deal because his family and I had talked about

it forever. It was like it was a national holiday and to his parents it was. Plus he and I had been writing to each other and he wanted to see me when he got back. It was a huge deal. My need to be wanted was also a huge deal.

How my story came out... or how I told my mother... was the beginning of years of trauma drama and stress and was short of a landslide. Actually, it was more like a volcano erupting.

So, "the Marine" was home. I don't remember how involved we were the last time he was home. I'm pretty sure that our entire relationship evolved around the letter writing and his mom cheering us on to be a couple.

Anyway, he was home on leave and it was a BIG DEAL. I was still in high school. I was a junior and had a strict curfew.

I really don't remember what happened that evening other than he and I ended up spending a lot of time together and I didn't care what time it was. He was paying attention to me.

Eventually he drove me home in his infamous shiny bright blue 19-something-or-other Chevy Malibu that was his version of a child. He loved that car and talked about it as if it was a living being. Cars were not a big deal in my family so this was very odd to me, but I didn't care, because it was him and he was amazing to me.

We sat in front of my house in this car and made out. I felt like I'd died and gone to heaven. I can't remember if

he was a good kisser or not. Which may say something. Ha! But I'm pretty sure I didn't care then. He was home. His family who loved me were ecstatic at his being home and he was kissing me. Life was perfect.

Well, until it wasn't and my mom came outside... I got out of the car and she slapped me on the face. She'd only done that one time before when I was younger, at which time I promptly responded by slamming a swinging door so hard that it came off the hinges.

This time I'd stayed out way past my curfew. I'd just gotten home from staying out all night. I mean all night. I'd never done that. I have no idea what happened immediately following that; however the slap and the emotion it triggered was the precursor to the major volcanic eruption of the story coming out.

I was grounded! That was a given.

It was a Saturday or Sunday morning (funny how some things are set in stone and others are fluzzy – as my girls used to say when they were younger). I was sitting outside on our front steps. Probably smoking since I wasn't allowed to smoke in the house – smart mom. Mom was inside vacuuming the living room. I was livid that she grounded me while he was home on leave. I stomped in the house and began yelling, or screaming, which is probably more accurate.

I can still feel the impact of these words coming out of my mouth. I very eloquently and violently screamed...

almost as if it'd been scripted, "I'd rather live with Rick and put up with his sexual abuse than live here with you, knowing (insert name here) is home on leave and I can't see him!"

Holy shit! Imagine your daughter coming in and yelling this at you.

She froze.

The surreal part of this is that I was raging clearly, but I had no idea that this was going to come out of my mouth. I was just raging or spewing or going postal or whatever you want to call it.

It felt like a volcano erupted inside of me and then it spewed all over my mom and our living room and the vacuum and any other objects in its way. Anything in the foreseeable area was the recipient of the lava and its orange glowing thick liquid lethal mess.

As I said, she froze. I don't remember the look on her face, but I have a vague memory (more like a sense) of her appearing shocked, stunned, and being in disbelief. Not disbelief of what I'd just said, but disbelief that I was yelling this at her as if it were her fault. Which it clearly was not.

I was furious with her for grounding me and I wanted her to know it and in my stressed out, fight or flight, hormone filled, teen brain, I needed her to know just how mad I was at her. Keep in mind, the feeling of being furious with her and the volcanic eruption happened simultaneously. They were both visceral, related but not connected... or so I thought.

I don't have a memory of thinking "does she believe me or not?" She immediately believed me.

She asked me if I'd "ever told" her this before. I said no. She'd recently taken a class on child abuse and had learned the "why some children don't report – they are not believed."

Rick, my adopted father, had a history of "messing around with his female college students." So I'm fairly certain this wasn't a stretch for her to believe what I shared.

SIDE NOTE:

THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT! When I say "she immediately believed me" is a golden nugget here because had she not, my life would have been dangerously different. She always believed me. I am very grateful for that.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT? Because over the years, as I shared my story with other women, I learned that I was not the norm. I've had many women trust me with their stories and I learned that most of them **WERE NOT BELIEVED**. Or they never told anyone up until recently, are suffering in life and are questioned by others as to **WHY** they are just now telling what happened to them.

Most of the women who were brave enough to tell their moms or other adult female caregivers were told that "it never happened." Most of these brave women have had their stories turned back on

them (BLAME THE VICTIM) or denied that it ever happened... Insert eye roll and shaking head here.

This is the denial or the blame and shame the victim shit that has been going on for centuries. And it's bullshit. Let's just call it what it is. It's bullshit. We all know these stories happen behind closed doors all the time.

And my heart goes out to those who have shared their stories in confidence or with the hope that the person they are telling will and or can do something about it... I'm speaking in reference to children who tell.

As a child, to be so brave to share a gross and ugly story, without maybe even having the words to describe what happened to them, give details of an event they don't even understand, and then to have the adult listening to flip or deny the story just adds salt to the wound and can re-traumatize the child, who tired to self-advocate.

Back to what happened next... Mom asked me to repeat it. I did. I felt numb. I felt rage. I felt betrayed. I felt disbelief. I was having *all* the feelings. But, at the same time, I was completely present and aware of what was happening. I was there witnessing all of this coming out of my mouth and a little shocked that it was happening at the same time. Almost as if it was happening to someone else and I was just part of the scene.

There is a short period of time that I don't remember immediately following my explosion. I'm pretty certain she asked me questions and I answered as best as I could in a semi calmed down rage state.

What I do remember is us leaving the living room and going into my bedroom and sitting on the floor and her calling him on the phone.

He answered. She told him what I'd said.

Wait for it...

Wait for it...

Wait for it...

He said, and I quote (because I'll NEVER forget this), "Carolyn, I'm going out of town and I'll call you when I get back."

"WHAT... are you f---g kidding me?" or something similar is what I was thinking at the time.

Yup! That's what he said. My mom was still in shock. I could tell by the blank look and profound confusion on her face as she repeated it to me, as if to say, "That's what he said, he didn't deny it, he just calmly said..." and then she repeated again what he said.

I'm pretty sure what I saw happen next was my mom going into problem solving mode. Her problem solving skills are exceptional. The next person she called was her attorney in Tennessee.

That began a lawsuit she filed on my behalf as I was a minor.

From that point on the trauma drama began. The lawsuit, the bullshit, the denials, the family drama, and anger from his mother towards me, his brother disowning me (someone I'd worshiped as an uncle and loved dearly), and more began to take shape and be an underlying current in our lives for what felt like forever.

It went on for roughly three years.

It was a nightmare at times... meaning, he denied it. Of course he did. What else was he going to do? He retained an attorney. He had a public image to uphold as Dr. Wilson, the longtime Political Science Professor at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. He was a Fulbright Professor who often taught in China, a local Politician, and an author. He was probably scared shitless about his secret getting out. Or in denial.

There are a few things that stand out that I do remember very clearly from the fall out of the "it getting out" story.

First, it went to court in Chattanooga, where he lived. He was friends with the judge (of course he was). I was told that the judge looked at the case (or file) and immediately dismissed it because then (I'm not sure if it's changed now), in 1980-something, a minor COULD NOT SUE a parent in the state of Tennessee.

The judge literally threw the case out.

I've watched enough legal TV shows in my 50 some years that I have this visual of a white male judge in robes,

sitting on his bench, which is, of course, elevated from the floor, looking through a pile of files, mine's on the top of the pile. He grabs it. Sees that the case title is Wilson (I was a Wilson then because he adopted me) versus Wilson. He opens it and reads further and sees on the front page that it's a "minor suing a parent," and it stops there... he goes no further to see what the case REALLY is about and thinks "Nope, not allowed." He then puts it in the "Nope" file pile and goes on with the rest of the stack.

That's the visual I get and have seen played out over and over and over in my head for decades, just like a TV show, but it wasn't a TV show. It was my life happening and it was unfair. Believe me, little me, teenage me, and all the other versions of me, have had a "it's not fair" mantra etched in my bones since this injustice took place.

The reality is I really have no idea how that all played out. I just know that the judge threw it out.

However, what happened next is pretty big. The attorney on the case appealed the ruling. It then went to the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals in 1984... and I won! I made legal history.* Well the case won. We (Mom and I) were nowhere near close to getting resolution, amends, or closure.

The reach and the tendrils that this story has had and continues to have, including the numbers of people it affected then and now (almost 50 years later), and how it

* <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/appellate-courts/F2/742/1004/213045/>

continues to play out in my life, in my daughters' lives, and in my brother's children's lives is ridiculous at best.

It affected everyone in Rick's immediate family. It affected my family. And it's affected my daughters who weren't even born until 30 years later. This is mind boggling. Let's start with the lawsuit itself and what I remember before jumping into how it affects my family today.

The lawsuit, once his family was made aware of it, caused a ripple effect that I, at the brilliant age of 16, could never have foreseen.

Two things as I said earlier stand out to me the most. The winter after the lawsuit was filed, we (Mom, Kevin, and I) were in southern Minnesota staying with my grandparents (Mom's parents). Both sets of grandparents lived in the same town, and, how convenient, that in a town of only 10,000 people, they lived across the street from each other!

As was customary when we arrived in town, Kevin and I would go to both houses, say hi, and love on the grandparents. Mom and Rick were married when I was three-years-old. So I don't really remember a time when his parents weren't my grandparents.

First, as per my usual, I ran into the house and hugged my grandma and grandpa, and then I went across the street to Rick's parents house to say hi.

As I walked in the side door of his parents' house attached to the driveway, as I'd done dozens of times over the years, his mom met me at the top of the steps that went

to her kitchen. She was a tall woman and was towering over me, standing on the inside steps. She was blocking me from entering the house any further and began yelling at me. Her words are still burned in my brain all these years later. "All you do is take, take, take. How could you do this? How could you hurt me like this? I'll never forgive you!"

I immediately felt like I was two feet tall and five years old as opposed to 16 years old and five feet and eight inches. I froze (seems to be a pattern here). I was in shock and couldn't believe she was saying this to me. I had no skills or experience with anything like this so I had no place to hang it mentally. I'd never been spoken to like this by an adult.

Clearly I had hurt her, but at that time (in my 16 year old brain) I couldn't comprehend the magnitude of this. She was an adult, and my grandma. Why would she not believe me?

I was shocked. I was hurt. I was confused. I was later angry. I ended up telling my friends who lived there. They were shocked, too, because they'd heard the story (sort of) and knew her well. These two best childhood friends (from that same town) and I had gone to his parents' cabin in the summers and had amazing fun for many years.

I can't imagine what was going on in her head at the time. I had "outed" and accused her son publicly of being a child molester. She obviously took it as a personal attack and lashed out at me. Looking back now, over the years I

recognize that as she was living in a small town, working in a school, she would be afraid of what would happen once the news made it around town. Her husband was also a local business owner so they were fairly well known.

My response to her verbal attack was to tell my friends and then promptly go write the word BITCH in big letters in the snow in her yard. It felt good, but I also knew in that moment that it would come back to haunt me. It did.

The other thing that happened on his family's side is that it ended, for many years, my relationship with his brother. He and I were never in the same space for too long, but, when we were, we connected, we played, and I loved him like he was the big brother I never had. I loved him. I trusted him. I felt safe with him.

That ended when the story came out. He stopped talking to me and my mom. We didn't see him for years. The teenage me desperately wanted him to believe me and just hear my side of the story. I tried once to talk to him on the phone to tell him I was sorry for what this had done to the family, and that I needed him to believe me. Why would I make this up?

I also knew how hard it must have been for him to hear those things.

But he wouldn't or couldn't... I don't know. I remember feeling like that hurt more than what his brother did to me. It still sometimes makes me cry. Working on that...

What it did to my immediate family was cause additional stress in the form of:

- My mom having to pay for an attorney on a single-mom-of-two's teacher salary
- Rick tried to convince Kevin it never happened and asked him to talk to me about it (yes he really did that... Kevin was 10ish)
- Me having to go to a therapist to deal with the stress and fear of being interviewed by his attorney and/or it possibly going to court
- The fear and stress of "being deposed"
- Being interviewed by myself, a minor, in a room with only his attorney (and court reporter) who berated and shamed me by saying things like, "You know this never happened. Why are you trying to destroy him?" and "We know you're making this up. You know this isn't true. Why are you lying?"

The lawsuit ultimately went back to the original court, but by the time it arrived there after all the back and forth, I was 18 and I could have legally taken the case on myself as an adult. There is no way in hell I was going to do that, nor could I, even if I wanted to. At 18 I was living in Madison, Wisconsin, attempting to learn "how to college" and live on my own. I was broke. I lived in an efficiency apartment (a single room), just off the Capitol, which meant I shared a kitchen the size of a closet and a bathroom with three other people who had their own single rooms, who I'd never met before.

But... and this is hysterical... you're gonna love this... Rick must have thought that I MIGHT or possibly would take the case on myself, because as soon as I turned 18 he started calling me. Remember, he adopted me when he and my mom married, when I was three. So, technically, I was his daughter.

From the time we left Tennessee and until then he'd never as much as sent me a birthday card or tried to speak to me. He'd never, not once, made an effort to talk to or connect with me in the six years since we left Chattanooga. But, then again, why would he? I was not his daughter and I certainly had no interest in speaking to him if he had made an attempt. Now, however, he was calling me at least once a week to "check up on me."

Once he thought it would be helpful to send me a check for \$16.00. When I asked him the following time he called what the money was for, he proudly said, "Well, Christy, it's to help you."

Go on... keep laughing... it's true. Yes, you read that right. He sent me a check for \$16. I almost fell off my bed laughing when I saw the check.

I'm not sure what he thought that was going to do for me, or better yet for him, other than appease his guilt. He was a university professor and a politician so I'm pretty sure he could have made at least a little more effort.

Have you ever heard of someone being bought off with \$16?

Keep laughing... I'm laughing while I'm writing this because I forgot how ridiculous this was. It's still funny. Pathetic on many levels... but funny.

The trauma drama trial never took place. After years of dealing with this, the financial resources that it depleted, the stress it caused, and the energy that it took, we decided to end it. Mom and I decided to end it for a few reasons.

Her attorneys told us that if it went to court there were only two possible outcomes.

- 1. We could lose** – he never had a record or any other criminal complaint against him YET and he was a big dog in academia and politics. I would also be subjected to being on the stand, questioned, and more than likely shamed and discredited in front of a jury. We knew that would end badly for me and I'd already suffered enough in the deposition.
- 2. If found guilty** he would go to prison for 10 years. The reality of that for Kevin would be unmeasurable. It would fracture the fabric of our little three unit family and that was not an option. Kevin shouldn't have to suffer more for his father's flaws.

That's the long story, with all its tendrils, of how I told my mom about the abuse.

I was stressed.

I erupted.

She found out.

It affected many, many people, not just me.

The trauma and its drama began...

But wait... there's more.

I want to make a really important point here.

Pay attention.

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE pay attention.

In this country alone the current statistics of childhood sexual assault as of 2020 are:

- 60,000 children yearly in America are victims of substantiated or indicated sexual abuse
- 55% of assaults are “at or near the victims home”
- 48% were sleeping, or performing another activity at home

This is me. This is also A LOT of other women AND these are also ONLY THOSE WHO REPORTED.

I believe the top main (there are many) reasons that children don't report, or women who were sexually assaulted as children don't report, is this (BECAUSE THIS IS SCIENCE and real life).

When you're a child and shit happens to you, your built-in safety system (autonomic nervous system) takes over for you, to keep you safe because when the assault is happening it is too much to process. Part of your brain goes offline (prefrontal cortex) so you're not entirely aware of what's going on because it's too overwhelming.

The stress chemicals that are swirling around in our bodies while the assault is going, and that more than likely stay there, cause fuzzy thinking, so when asked, we MAY

NOT remember everything crystal clearly. As children we don't have the capacity or words or experience or skills to fight off the predator, so a lot of us go into a freeze or shutdown mode because it is safer than trying to fight or run away.

We've seen and heard time and time again of women speaking their truth about this only to be shamed and blamed and not believed because they were questioned "Why didn't you tell the story earlier?" or "Why did you wait so long to tell anyone?"

Let's chat about this for a minute.

THE SHAME & BLAME GAME

Shaming is hateful and does more harm than good and is typically done by people who do not understand how trauma works. Believe me, I've shamed myself enough. I certainly don't need others to do it, nor does anyone else.

What's that saying? "Unless you've walked a mile in someone's shoes..." paraphrased from the Mary Lathrop poem "Judge Softly," people need to stop. When you judge someone you are telling the world that you know better or you would have done better. Discounting and discrediting the person and or their experience in question is shameful. End of story.

VICTIM BLAMING... No one asks to be assaulted. Especially a child. Regardless of how short a skirt was or any

of those other ridiculous phrases you hear being said that negates the victim's experience and puts her at fault.

We also shame ourselves. Consciously or unconsciously we do it. We do it because our maladaptive behaviors that are a result of unprocessed trauma continue to play out in our lives, through being overwhelmed and not understanding why. Through over reacting instead of responding. Through feeling like we are not good enough because the voice of anxiety and depression in our head tells us we are not. Through struggling in personal relationships and not understanding why we keep attracting drama.

I also want to put a new spin on this for a moment. This may not be new to some of you, however it may be the first time a few of you have heard this. Hear me out before you throw this book across the room and it breaks your favorite thing.

If you were assaulted, there's about a 300% chance that your assaulter was victimized too. Just like the line in the song from the musical *South Pacific* that says "You have to be carefully taught" (which is about teaching racism), you also have to be carefully taught, I mean groomed, about sex and how to use it as a weapon.

Ask yourself: "Who assaulted them? Who assaulted the predators?"

And before you get mad about this... hang on... I am NOT letting this person, the predator, off the hook.

I'M NOT! Really. I just want you to look at it from a more global and generational trauma perspective. The big picture, if you will.

Who messed with them? What other lovely, scared, traumatized, stressed, messed up, scared child, post-traumatic, stressed out, angry, sad, adult who hadn't dealt with their own shit, victimized them? And, for that matter, how far back does that really go?

Take a minute to breathe that in...

Do you see where I'm going with this?

The reason I'm bringing this up is because I've spent many hours and years thinking (when I'm not in my victim, sad, depressed, and stressed pity party brain) where did he learn that? Meaning Rick, my abuser.

Who messed with him? Was it someone he was related to? Was it someone he trusted? How old was he? What did they do to him? Where did it happen? Who was supposed to be protecting him? Was it at his house? Was he sleeping?

If you've never thought about this... as my girls say, "sorry not sorry." Exhale. These big aha moments take a minute or year to process.

If you have thought about this... well done! You've stepped back, maybe took a huge pause, exhaled, and looked at how this messy life works from a different perspective. Let's keep growing and learning and raising the frequency of us and our world together.

Please know this is NOT me LETTING HIM OFF THE HOOK.

Oprah said many years ago in an interview (my ears honed in on this like the universe was speaking to me directly, when the guest was explaining how trauma works). Oprah's response was, "We should be asking what happened to you instead of what's wrong with you." Which is now the title of her widely popular book, *What Happened to You*. My perpetrator's behavior, his predatory behavior, is an EXPLANATION not an EXCUSE.

TEACHABLE MOMENT

This looking deeper, bigger, broader is part of my work, and that's part of why I'm writing this book – for all of us to gain perspective. A more global universal perspective of how trauma and healing works. To heal not only myself, but hopefully it prompts you, if you need it and others as well. Trauma work and healing first starts with you. Your intention to heal. Your curiosity about how things work. Your commitment to learn how to love yourself through healing. Understand that not everyone is affected in the same way. Each of us has a nervous system that can respond in a variety of ways to what the universe gives us. Once we understand how trauma works, how our nervous system works we can hopefully be more gentle with ourselves. Give ourselves and others more grace. We can begin to use tools that serve us as we heal. We can heal future generations and co-create a world where we all want to live. Amplify your curiosity which can cultivate more compassion.

Now, it's your turn to decide what to do with this...

About the Author

Christine Varnavas is an educator, author, speaker, mother, a TRE® Global Certification Trainer, a Women's Wellness Advisor, and a childhood sexual abuse survivor. Her passion for movement, laughter, and fun has fueled her teaching and training for over 30 years where she's helped countless women globally to feel better in their skin and raise their resilience. She invites you to fall in love with taking care of yourself.

You can learn more about Christine, her work, and more at christinevarnavas.com

Heal Your Sh!t Find Your Happy

is a call to action for women who manage anxiety, who gracefully (or not) handle the overwhelm and stress of life, maybe depression, who have felt like they were spinning out of control, who've ever been called "too much," or who've often thought, "what is wrong with me?" It's for adult survivors of childhood sexual assault and the people who love them.



Author **Christine Varnavas** educates the reader on how stress and trauma work and how it affects us and those around us if not released; she also shares parts of her story, some not so fun things, and the amazing somatic (body-based) tools that showed up in her life to help her feel and heal just when she needed them. The invitation is to do the work in your body, in this lifetime, on this planet, right now, to heal and break the chain of generational trauma, using the wicked wisdom of our bodies and maybe have some fun doing it!

"Christy shares a memoir of her journey to MOVE through the fragmenting thoughts and emotions of FEAR, following a childhood trauma, to remember her wholeness. She relates her experiences with courage and compassion for herself and all the travelers on this road."

~ Carleen Sterner, Ayurvedic Health Practitioner

"As someone who had a front-row seat to much of Christine's story, I found myself transfixed to the pages. Christine's story is one that not only informs the mind but also the heart. It is an amazing book to keep close to you, to return to repeatedly, whether you are healing or, like I am, in the profession of helping others to heal, this book is for you."

~ Dr. Amy Schlieve, Schlieve Consulting



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