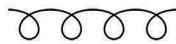


**You Should  
Write A  
Book!**

TRUE TALES  
OF AN  
UNSTABLE LIFE





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To Mom and Dad



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Karen, sorry about the cat “incident.”

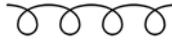
Special thanks to Russ for not killing me with a fork that one time, and for not turning out to be nearly the asshole I originally thought you were. And to you, Jill, for letting me share our work “experiences.” You’re the twin sister I always knew I was supposed to have.

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## CHAPTER 1



# STABILITY ISSUES

This book's title, *You Should Write a Book*, came about because my best friend in college, Jennifer, always loved the stories I told her about me falling down, or the cliches I'd get mixed up, or the weird people I worked with, and crazy situations I always found myself in.

As I write this morning with an ice pack on my knee and I reflect on the stories throughout the book in your hands, I realize that there could probably be a more fitting title.

A few I've toyed with: *Bring Mommy A Martini*, inspired by my blog, which has the same title, and is loosely based on my own life (as a daughter *and* as a mother), or *Issues With Stability*, because, the thing is: I really *do* want to know if there's something wrong with me. Here's what happened this morning:

I had just gotten mail out of the mailbox and turned around to get back in my car (remember when homes had their very own mailbox in their very own front yard? I loved that. Our neighborhood, like many these days, has gone to

the group mailbox concept, where banks of mailboxes are set up every few blocks). I don't mind this, not really. But I *do* mind when the mailman unbundles the bulk mail, leaving the plastic packing straps on the ground (I never knew how much I minded this, though, until this morning).

With my arms full of mail, I turned quickly, and - moving very fast because I'm always in a hurry, and I have no idea why - I think it's because I'm a terrible time manager, and I'm always running late. Anyhoo, I turned quickly, and I had full momentum behind me when one foot got caught in the loop of the plastic packing strap while my other foot held the opposite end of the loop down tight.

Like a slingshot.

I catapulted off the curb and into the street in front of my car. I was hog-tied. Lucky for me it was the busiest time of the day, so there was lots of traffic passing by when all 105 pounds of me (give or take... I'm short, so I may look a little heavier) went down - hard - on all fours, my mail and mailbox keys soaring into the air, then fluttering down around me.

Here's the thing: I really love my neighborhood. We've lived here for about 14 years and I love my neighbors and I love my house. So it would be really nice if I could say that falling in the street in my neighborhood isn't that big of a deal because I don't know these people, but that's not the case at all. I know a lot of people in my neighborhood.

So my first reaction this morning was the thought, "Oh my God now I have to move to a new town," because moving away is always my go-to reaction when something embarrassing happens (which is quite often, as you'll come to learn in this book: "Oh my *God*, I blew a snot bubble during that presentation - I have to quit my job and move!" "Oh *geez*, I just tootied in the restaurant when my boyfriend made me laugh really hard - now I have to break up with him and move!").

But then I remembered, "Oh wait! These people have already seen me falling in the street before," so that was a relief, knowing I didn't have to move away.

The last time I fell in the street of my neighborhood - no, it was the time *before* that - I was jogging (because I took up jogging for a minute) with my two dogs, Cooper and Lilly. My dogs are super sweet Lab mixes, and they do great on the leash.

Unless they see a squirrel, and then they turn into psychopathic assholes. That's what happened that day. I was jogging and my dogs saw a squirrel, so they spiraled around me - one going one way, the other going the opposite way - tying my legs up like one of those toy pull-string tops kids used to play with before TV was invented.

I went down in the street, my arms stuck in the leash handles, my legs bound together, leaving me flopping around like a beached mermaid.

It was landscaping day in the neighborhood, and landscapers were nearby mowing and weed-whacking, but all looking the other way, pretending they hadn't seen the calamity go down. Literally. My neighbor sells drugs, so I knew he'd be out and about and could swing by to pick me up.

I'd sprained my ankle, putting me in a boot for a month, which was super sexy.

About a month later - I knew I wasn't ready, but since my girlfriends and I were all wearing tutu's on the famous New Orleans Bourbon Street, - I had to wear flip flops, because they were the only thing cute enough. I'd just shucked the boot, but my foot still didn't feel completely connected to my body. Still, I plowed ahead.

You know how this ends: my rickety still-healing ankle combined with the flip-flop failed me, and down I went.

On Bourbon Street.

In a tutu.

I sat flat on my butt, the tutu spread out around me, my butt cheeks having made full contact with the street's brick surface since, as I went down, my undies were gobbled right up into the crack of my arse. It hurt terribly, my tail bone having been drilled into the pavement, my spine compacted into half its original length, and freshly re-twisting my little bird ankle.

But I did what I always do when I fall: I sat there, laughing, not even able to catch my breath (truthfully, this time it was a laugh-cry, because I really was hurt). All my friends - husbands included - stood around me in a circle, with worried looks on their faces as they looked down at me, asking me if I was alright, and reaching down to help me.

Except for my best friend, Chrissy, who couldn't get one word out of her mouth because she was laughing so hard. Tears streamed down her face with laughter. She thinks falling is hilarious. So I guess it's great that we're friends, because I obviously keep her entertained.

After we got back home, I was back in the boot for a week or so, but I took it easy for another three or four months, so I could let my ankle heal completely.

About 6 months later, my body fully healed now, I set out for a walk with the dogs - not a jog - a walk, so that I could easily manage them if there were any squirrel sightings.

There weren't any squirrels on that walk. I don't know what it was that time, that made them cross in front of me, my body tumbling end over end, like I was a human-sized domino - right over my dogs, and right off the curb onto the side of the street.

So you can see, now, that this book probably needed a title that's more appropriate. I liked *Stability Issues*, to play off the double meaning of "stability," since there's evidence of questionable mental stability sprinkled throughout the book.

Or *Is There a Doctor In The House?* Not just because I want to know if there's something wrong with my brain (but that, too) - but because it's very likely that at this very same moment you're reading these words, I'm nursing wounds from some sort of fall.

Or worse: I'm face-down in the middle of the street somewhere. (Sweet Jesus, I only wish I were kidding about that!)

I called my mom after this morning's fall to ask her if I'd been dropped as a baby or something. She assured me I hadn't. I asked her what could possibly be wrong with me, and she answered, "You're just not sure-footed, or something. I don't know," a statement that should be filed in the "Understatement of the Year" category, sub categorized under "No Shit."

A few months ago, when I was at my son's school, another mom was there waiting in the lobby, and she had a service dog with her. Very rudely, before I could stop myself, I asked her what her service dog was for, then I immediately apologized, and said I couldn't believe I'd asked that. I might as well have asked, "So, what's your disability?" She said, "Oh no, it's completely fine. I have him because I have stability issues."

What?! This was great news! I had no idea there was such a thing! And I'm obviously the perfect candidate, seeing that when I stacked up all my note cards just for this book alone, more than half of the inch-tall stack was about me falling down.

I talked to Chrissy about this, going on and on about how exciting it was, and wouldn't it be great if I could get a service dog to help with my stability issues? She couldn't even answer for a moment, she was laughing so hard. When she laughs really hard, it's silent, except for a few tiny little gasps of air that squeak out.

"What? What's so funny? Why are you laughing?" I couldn't get a response, but I could hear her little squeaky gasps.

Then finally, as she caught her breath a bit, she said, "Oh my God, you can't be serious. You just want an excuse to get another dog. And anyway, that's the worst idea for you. You'd just trip over it."

"They're trained to help with stability, Chrissy. I think it would know not to walk right in front of me."

"You do *not* need a stability dog. You need a stability *chair*. Like a wheelchair. Or a walker."

Like many other things I blame on my mom, my stability issues (mental and physical) are most assuredly her fault. I'm a mom, so I know how this works: any problem, ailment, snafu, or "situation" is the mom's fault.

When I was about 10, my mom was driving my brother and me home from the mall one evening. She hardly ever drove at night, and this was a school night, *and* it was drizzling, so there must have been a big sale on something plaid or orange.

My mom's car was a white 1979 Ford Mustang with red interior, and red and black houndstooth upholstery. I sat in the passenger seat and my little brother straddled the hump in the floorboard of the back seat, squishing himself in between my seat and my mom's.

My mom says that I was singing when we were slammed into by a teenage driver, but I don't remember that. I thought I'd been sleeping, but I couldn't have been, since we'd only just pulled out of the mall parking lot.

People didn't wear seat belts back then. Cars had them, of course they did. But nobody used them. We'd been going through an intersection - none of us buckled - when the teenager turned right into us, sending our car spinning in circles as it shot across the intersection into a light pole. My mom's arm launched out like it was powered by some sort of herculean mommy muscles, and stopped my brother's body as it torpedoed forward, heading straight for the windshield.

Her door crumpled in around her and now had her pinned into a metal-and-houndstooth-fabric cocoon.

The dashboard originally had two levels: a higher level - almost like a shelf - over the driver's controls, then a rounded ledge dropped to the lower level around the center point. That rounded ledge now had a spider-web-shaped crack that spread the full width of the dash. My face did that.

I had been thrown forward and diagonally, and hit that point with my jaw, splitting the dashboard in a hundred different directions.

We were right in front of the Montgomery Ward Auto Center, and the mechanics all ran out to help us. One of the men walked me to the bathroom inside, where I saw my pigtails weren't on the sides of my head, anymore, but were now shifted: one in the back of my head, the other in the front, like a pitiful puffy-faced, redheaded unicorn.

An ambulance was called, but my mom sent it away because she didn't want us kids to be scared. So... *that* was a weird decision, but I'm not going to judge *this* woman who has a bionic arm, and somehow kept us all *inside* the vehicle that night.

I bring this up, not because I want you gasp and think, “*Oh my gosh, how awful!*” (although it would be super weird if you didn’t), but because I wonder if maybe *this* is the reason I have stability issues.

What are your thoughts? I need to know if I have repercussions from a traumatic brain injury that was never dealt with. Or some sort of disorder. I’ll happily travel for any testing you may have up your sleeve. I’d be absolutely thrilled to be your lab rat. You don’t even need to contact my current and past doctors to get my records; you can consider this book my entire medical file. (You’ll of course need to purchase a separate copy for each person on your medical staff to review individually.) Please contact me with my diagnosis.

---

Yep, that’s me. I’ve always been pretty easy to read, expression-wise.



I don’t remember this exact day in history, or what happened to put that sour expression on my face. I was very... *delicate* as a child, and anything could have put me in a lather resulting in that expression.

Between running into the Stop-N-Go for a pack of Salem 100’s for my mom, who couldn’t peel herself off the white vinyl interior of our 1975 sedan to get them for herself, and my evil Aunt Kathy, who’d spin me around in circles and then laugh at me because I couldn’t walk straight, I had a lot of pent-up anger.

I should also mention that I desperately wanted a twin sister, and that’s just one area where my mom and dad let me down. I was an only child until my brother came along

when I was almost six, but until then, I had everyone's attention all to myself.

My mom would put puzzles together with me, and we'd play dolls. But only sometimes, and not nearly as often as I asked her to. My dad fed me story prompts and encouraged me to write, like I was some sort of puppet. They smothered me in an attempt to make me feel loved and "well adjusted."

But that's not what I wanted. I wanted a twin. I dealt with the pain of my childhood by furiously writing poetry about nature, sadness, all laced with an overall feeling of loss.

The loss of my twin. Obviously.

One Christmas (I was younger than in that picture up there, I swear) (*\*\*note to self: fact check that last claim, and remove this story if it turns out I was old enough for it to be weird*) my parents got me a life-size doll with red hair and brown eyes.

It looked just like me (no it didn't). "Life-size" meant "bigger than normal dolls, but smaller than humans." It was considerably smaller than me. By at least a foot.

Back then, children played outside. We had a bunch of kids on my street, and one of my first friends was a boy named Patrick. He was in my grade and was a very nice boy with very nice manners. He liked to tell me sometimes how I did not have very nice manners.

Like the time I was eating a sandwich outside and he informed me that it was rude to bring a sandwich outside, unless I had enough for everyone.

Bored by our usual games of tag and kick the can (which we really did play, even though this was the 70's, not the 30's, but this was a small town right on the Red River, and there wasn't a whole lot to do besides drugs and stuff, but

we weren't old enough, yet), I made some off-handed comment about my sister.

Patrick, who'd known me and had lived only a few houses down from me for the last four or five years asked, "Your *sister*? You don't have a sister."

Looking at him like he was a silly mule, I replied (slowly, so he could understand), "Yeeessss I do. I have a twin. Maybe you just never noticed because we look exactly the same."

"No you don't."

"Yes I do."

"No you don't."

"Yes I do."

Spanish-style homes were popular in those days. The homes in my neighborhood had tall, thin windows on the front, with ornate wrought-iron grates over them. They had arched entryways, heavy and ornately-scrolled wooden front doors (not the composite junk that's popular nowadays), and dark wood accents.

Appliances were in shades they called "Avocado" and "Harvest Gold," but they were really just green and orange. The colors were horrible. "Earth colors," my mom told me recently, with a nostalgic look on her face. "Everything was about the earth in those days."

Our house, like most other homes back then, had thick, mustard-yellow shag carpet that my friend, Lena's family would rake instead of vacuuming it. My mom said that's what people did back then, but I don't remember anyone ever raking *our* carpet. Mom insists that you'd first vacuum and then rake, to fluff it up.

But Lena's family raked *instead* of vacuuming, and I know that for a *fact*. They had an outdoor rake for yard work and an indoor rake for raking the carpet. For chores, Lena was supposed to keep her room clean, and if she wanted extra money, she could rake the carpet.

In their living room, they had a type of lamp that looked like the top and bottom of a flower vase suspended in mid-air, but when you stepped close, you could see they were connected by threads of clear fishing line. Perched in the center was a faux bronze woman - a goddess, I presume - surrounded by plastic greenery.

When the lamp was turned on, a spotlight would shine down on the goddess, but wait - there's more: oil would gently and slowly drip down the fishing line to make it look like it was gently raining around the goddess.

I'm begging you to stop reading right now and Google "vintage oil rain lamp."

Back to my twin:

"Krissy, I *know* you don't have a sister," Patrick said.

"Yes I do!" I insisted.

"Ok, then.... Go get her," he pressed.

Shrugging a bit, in an *Ok, if you say so* manner, I went inside, changed clothes, and dressed my doll in the clothes I'd been wearing. I peeked through the mini blinds, and when Patrick and the other kids weren't looking, I stuck my doll in the window.

I ran outside in my freshly-changed outfit and said, "Hi Patrick, Krissy said you wanted me to come outside?" (My family and childhood friends called me Krissy back then. I started going by my full name when I was in 8th grade

because Kristan sounded *much* more mature.

Plus I didn't want any negative connotation to Chrissy Snow, the big-boobed ding-a-ling from *Three's Company*, a popular sitcom in the 70's and 80's. I wanted to be known for being smart and savvy. And clearly I was, because do *you* know anyone else who, at such a young and tender age, had taken on the great responsibility of playing twin sisters in a real life scenario? I didn't think so.)

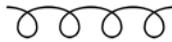
Patrick stared at me for a long moment, then explained to me that he *knew* I was Krissy, he *knew* I'd changed my clothes, and he *knew* that "girl" in the window was a doll and not a real human. He then told me that it wasn't very nice manners to lie to your friends.

At first, I put up a fight, arguing that that *was* Krissy in the window, and that I *was* her twin sister, and that he and I (the twin) had actually known each other for years, but when he'd referred to me as Krissy, I'd never corrected him because everyone always got us mixed up, and I was just used to it.

But then I realized how much work it would be to keep up this charade, so I silently admitted defeat, and ran inside.

Come to think of it, I never did come clean with Patrick on this issue. I wonder if he still to this day might question whether that *was* a twin leaning stiff as a poker in my window, staring out at us that day.

## CHAPTER 2



### LIES, NARCISSISM, & SHOPLIFTING

You'd think, based on what I've shared about my childhood so far, that I was a troubled and sad little girl. The truth is, I had a lovely childhood, and doting parents. Depression and anxiety do run in my family, but it would be years before those little buggers would rear their ugly heads in my life (but don't you worry, we'll get to that soon enough).

No, I wasn't troubled or sad as a kid. Just moody and dramatic. Maybe a *touch* weird.

I would infuse a mix of morose emotions into my poetry, which I used as a tool to deal with the pain of being a non-twin. I wrote constantly. Poetry, prose, songs. I was quite the little word master, thanks to my parents encouraging me to write and giving me silly story prompts: "Write a story about why a frog says, 'ribbit,'" my dad would say. Or, "Write about why a gorilla scratches his armpits." There was an ulterior motive, I'm sure.

As a child, I tended to be a bit of a Chatty Kathy. I was relentless in trying to hold people's attention. I always had

a story to tell. If you're a parent, you know exactly what my poor mom and dad dealt with. The incessant chatter of mostly pure nonsense, the same, "Mommy, look!" or "Daddy, look!" that all parents experience over and over and over.

In what I'm sure was the last straw before a horrible display of parenting that surely would have included a string of four-letter words, scarring my tender mind, one of my parents had the brilliant idea of having me write the stories down.

Truthfully, they probably didn't give one diddle about whether I wrote or drew stuff, as long as I was quiet for just one God-forsaken minute. Still, they probably saw that my drawings didn't have much potential, so they encouraged the writing.

But I didn't want to be a writer. I wanted to be an artist. I wanted to be an artist and a twin. Is that really so much to ask?

When I was in second grade, my school district hosted a contest, themed "What Freedom Means to Me." My teacher, Mrs. Blair, encouraged me to enter. I threw together a poem, using all the buzz words my second grade mind knew would really get to the heart of the judges. Mrs. Blair worked with me after I turned in the final piece, helping me erase stray marks, and make my handwriting neater.

I couldn't wrap that thing up fast enough, so that I could get to my *real* entry: my drawing. Nobody knew I planned to submit a piece for the art category. It would be a surprise.

I drew the picture of what freedom meant to me, using lots of red, white, and blue, of course, and turned it in. It wasn't easy for me. I'm not a natural artist, by any means. But I worked so, so hard to make it perfect.

A few weeks later, my parents told me my submission

had moved on to the next level - regionals, maybe? I can't remember. We'll say regionals because it sounds super-important, and I'm telling you this story to impress you. My piece won! First place! There would be an awards ceremony and everything. I couldn't have been more proud of myself for working so hard for something and sticking with it for the entire hour it took to create.

I remember sitting in the huge auditorium, filled with children who'd be accepting awards like me, their parents and other family members, and— *what? A TV camera?* I was going to be on TV!

Starting with the older groups, the lady with the microphone on stage announced winners, and they came down the aisle one by one to accept their award, while I waited patiently, swinging my little legs back and forth. This was very exciting.

I looked the prettiest of all the other little girls there. My hair was curled, parted down the middle, and my cowlick was slicked down tight. I had on my best dress: brown and navy plaid ("earth colors"), navy knee-high socks, and brown leather Buster Browns. My mom shopped for my clothes at Young Fashions on the square in downtown Denison, Texas, and they carried the finest quality and most stylish kids' clothing a little town by the river could hope for.

She said my name. *She said my name!* I popped up, and walked down the aisle, the crowd roaring with claps and hoorah's (to the best of my memory). The microphone lady handed me my trophy (*a trophy!*) and said, with a thick Red River-border-of-Texas accent, "Now Krissy, tell us about your piece," and she bent down and put the microphone up to my face.

I took the microphone from her, faced the crowd (this was my television debut, you know), and said, "My picture was all about being able to do whatever we want to do in our country, and how much I love our country, and how I love

being able to do whatever I want to do because of my freedom.”

She reached for the microphone, but I wasn't finished, so I turned away from her just a bit and continued, “I drew a picture of my family doing whatever we want to do because we have the freedom to do what we want to do because our country has freedom and we love our country, and we love freedom.”

She furled her brow a little - for just a second - then smiled awkwardly and took back control of her microphone. “Okay, well thank you very much, Krissy,” she said, then shuttled me along. I held my head high, and walked proudly back to my seat with my shiny trophy, engraved with my name and the words, “First Place Poetry and Prose.” Whatever “prose” meant. It was obviously another word for “art.”

My mom leaned over to me and said, “You didn't win for your picture. You won for your poem.” I was devastated. I didn't care about winning for writing. I wanted to be an artist.

I told people for years that my trophy was for winning an art show.

---

My first grade teacher, Mrs. Stewart, was unpinning artwork from the bulletin board as I chattered on and on. “Mhmmm, wowww,” she said to me patiently. I was “helping” her by holding the staples as she pulled them out of the cork board. I must have felt that I wasn't getting quite the engagement from her that I needed, so I told her my mom was pregnant and was going to have a baby that very next week.

She was precious, that Mrs. Stewart.

“She *is*? Wow, how *lucky* you are! You’re going to have *two* babies at home!” Oh how she indulged me. I should have tightened up some facts first, considering my mom had just given birth to my brother about a week prior.

I was excited to have a new baby brother. Truly. But if I’m being honest, it was probably because I saw the potential boost in attention since people would drop by the house to visit. As it turned out, they were there to see the baby and my mom.

This wasn’t going to work.

Not only was this vile creature carving into my time, but he was a *boy*. I wanted a sister. I wanted a *twin* sister, but let’s not beat a dead horse.

Mrs. Stewart obviously knew I was a fibster when I told her we had another new baby coming just any day.

Back in those days, schools provided little cartons of milk mid-morning to all the children. My first grade year was also the year I’d fill my mouth with chocolate milk, run to the bathroom (which was in the classroom), and “throw up” into the toilet. Not really to get sent home, although that would end up happening, too. It was for the attention.

I’d get busted lying so many times, I’d finally come to realize that I was a terrible liar. I was getting the wrong kind of attention, I now knew, and I became too scared to lie. I had to come up with another way to get attention.

I’d have to use my communication skills.

I’ve always been a good listener. Well, I *was* until I became a mom. Once my kids hit the toddler stage, hearing “Mommy look, look at this, Mommy, look, look, look, Mommy, Mommy, look, did you see that? Did you see it, Mommy? Mommy, you aren’t looking!” I started tuning out

certain voices. The voices of my children.

I even got so annoyed and pushed over the edge when my son was only four, I bent down, looked him in the eyes, and said in my mean-whisper, “Don’t call me Mommy one more time today, you understand? If you need me today, you call me Kristan. Got it?” He looked up at me with his big brown eyes and said sweetly, “Okay, Mommy.”

But that was much later in my life.

For now, I’d need to put my listening skills to work, always paying attention to what was going on around me.

My parents were really close friends with a family that lived right behind us. Our back yards shared a fence, and I became best friends with their daughter, Melanie, even though she was a few years younger than me. Our families got together almost every single weekend at one another’s houses, us girls playing dolls and the grown-ups having dinner and margaritas.

As a mom, I know to pay special attention to the things I say in front of my kids. Especially the young one, because little ones can’t possibly know what is appropriate to repeat and what isn’t. Apparently moms of in the 70’s weren’t so forward-thinking, because my mom and her friends just jibber-jawed about everything. Right in front of us!

Or maybe I’m not remembering that right. Maybe I just overheard them talking when we were in the room nearby. Either way, I knew one of my other neighbor friends, Natalie, would need a shoulder to cry on, since, as I’d learned from hearing the moms talking, her parents were getting divorced.

I was right: she was devastated. Especially since she found out from *me*. My mom received an understandably angry ass-chewing from Natalie’s mom in our front yard, where Mom was chewed up one side and down the other for cracking the story wide open for Natalie.

My mom paid that ass-chewing forward, laying into me for running my mouth. This was my first real experience with sticking my foot in my mouth, and even though I paid dearly for it, there would be more instances in my life. But this one was the worst. I was forced to call Natalie's mom - who already scared the heezey out of me - and apologize to her.

Our kitchen was small and had blue wallpaper with tiny cream-colored flowers. We had green appliances (ahem - "avocado"), and a yellow Princess phone, complete with a long coiled cord, tangled up in at least three places, hanging on the wall.

My mom coached me on what to say. "Tell her you're sorry you opened your mouth about something private to their family. Tell her you're sorry you didn't mind your own business. Tell her you're sorry for gossiping," she said. In fairness to me, that last one should have been for *her* to say, but that's neither here nor there.

I was shaking when I picked up the handset, my fingers nervously working with the tangled cord as the line rang on the other end. Maybe she wouldn't answer. It rang once... twice... three times...

"Hello?" *Ack!!*

My voice shook and my stomach ate itself as I said all those things my mom told me to say. Natalie's mom didn't go easy on me. She let me have it just as much as my mom had.

That wasn't the only time my mom used the phone as a tool to inflict cruel punishment on me. A few years later, I'd gone to Six Flags with a group of friends and had the worst and weirdest stomachache of my life.

When I got home that night, I couldn't even eat, and went straight to bed. The next morning, when I woke up, I realized there was a stain of blood in my underwear. Was this what I thought it was? I knew I couldn't say anything to my mom, because of what happened the last time I saw a drop of blood in my undies.

A few years earlier, the neighborhood kids and I rode our bikes around, and played games where we swapped bikes with each other. I jumped on my friend, Patrick's, bike. Patrick, like all my other friends, was taller than me. I got on my tiptoes and tried to pedal away, but I had a hard time getting going because the bike was so tall.

I've never understood why boys' bikes have that bar across the top, considering their "boy parts." I finally took off and got some momentum, but when it came time to switch bikes again, I went to stop and put my feet down, sliding forward off the seat, and - "ooooowwww!!" I'd come straight down hitting my "girl parts" - hard - on that boy-bike-bar.

I must have had a little cut down there because it burned when I peed for a few days.

My mom took me for a "check up" and told the doctor she'd found blood in my skivvies, and wasn't I way too young to get my period?, and could the doctor check to make sure everything looked ok? The pediatrician and my mom asked me all kinds of questions to make sure that I indeed had *not* gotten my period, and that I would know what to look for when I finally did.

I was horrified that this conversation was happening. Yes, I was too young to get my period, no, I hadn't gotten it, yet, and yes, I did know how to recognize it when I finally did get it, thanks to those embarrassing videos they showed at school.

Now I really *had* gotten my period, but I didn't want to

tell my mom because I didn't want to talk about it. I already needed therapy for the *first* time she thought I'd gotten it. But - despite those ultra-informative videos in school - I didn't know what to do. There was no way around it. I had to tell my mom.

She was thrilled. "You need to call your Nana," she told me.

"What? *No!*" I thought I would die if I had to talk about this embarrassing situation one more second, much less make a phone call about it. No matter how much I resisted, she won. She forced me to call my Nana and tell her I got my period.

I made my mom stretch the cord all the way out the back door so that I could be outside on the back porch when I said the words to Nana. I didn't want to risk anyone else in the house hearing this humiliating conversation.

When Nana answered, I whispered the big news. She couldn't hear me, so I had to say it louder. I felt my face flush hot. She still didn't hear me. I had to speak up even louder, and after I said it loud enough for her to hear, I glanced up and saw that my next-door neighbor - the cute new boy that just moved in, and was in a few of my classes - was on *his* back porch, too.

I know he'd heard me when I'd shouted, "I got my period today!"

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Since this book is a tell-all, I suppose I should lay it all out. If there was ever a time to come clean and admit some of my deep, dark secrets, this would be it.

Don't get too excited, I've never done anything *too* frisky. I've never done an illegal drug in my entire life (the reason,

I'm sure, that my children are so adorable), and I've never broken the law, aside from being a lead-foot and for buying beer that one time before I was of legal age.

Well, there *was* that one mini-pack of Tampax Slender Regulars I stole from the hospital where I volunteered at as a Candy Striper. But I wasn't caught for that one, *and* I took them for a very good reason.

It was circa 1982, and I was in 8th grade. I wanted desperately to be a tampon-wearer, but there was a lot of talk in the girls' locker room during P.E. about tampon wearing. There was this one girl in particular - she was *awful* - a loud, obnoxious bully, named Brenda.

While all the rest of us hid behind the open doors of our lockers to quickly change into and out of our P.E. uniforms, she'd prance around in her undies and bra, and yell about how so-and-so was a bitch, or how much she hated that school and whatever teacher she had it out for that day.

She was also self-deemed as The One to teach the rest of us Life Lessons 101.

Brenda was the one that told us - by shouting it to one of the other girls in the locker room, as if she were some sort of ridiculous oaf - that you can't wear tampons if you're a virgin.

There was a lot of rumbling about the topic after Brenda made this proclamation. Where Brenda couldn't hear, of course, people whispered to each other, "Umm, I don't think that's true," and, "Wait, but I'm a virgin, and I wear tampons all the time," to which Brenda overheard and replied in her thickest white trash, "Then you ain't a virgin!"

There were several people I trusted in the locker room that day. And according to them, you didn't have to be a virgin to wear tampons. As I said, I was desperate to be a tampon-wearer, because these more mature and well-

respected friends wore them, and if tampons were good enough for them....

Certainly now I realize I should've just asked my mom about this. But I didn't want her to think I was sleeping around, which is funny if you knew me as an 8th grader. Kids in 8th grade nowadays are far more mature than they were in the early 80's. We hardly even used curse words. And we wore clothing that covered our bodies. We were like freaking nuns compared to 8th graders today.

Also, things didn't turn out very well for me the last time I'd talked to my mom about something really important and serious. All the popular girls had bangs, and I told my mom that I wanted bangs, too. She said that because of a widow's peak and cowlick in the center of my hairline, bangs would never work.

That wasn't the answer I'd wanted, so the night before school portraits, I took the liberty of cutting my own bangs. Sadly, I'd cut them too short, so to compensate, I'd have to do some creative handy-work with the curling iron. My school picture for that year shows me with a ladybug tattoo on my earlobe, a puffy left eye (allergies), and my bangs curled in a tight roll across the top of my forehead.

Since I didn't want my mom to think I was slutty, and since I wasn't 100% sure on the compatibility of a tampon with the vagina of a virgin, I felt like I needed to figure this out on my own.

I was stationed in the gift shop at the hospital, and there was nobody around (which wasn't unusual. The gift shop at that hospital was like a morgue. Which is an unfortunate environment in a hospital setting, now that I think about it), and I slowly walked past the feminine hygiene section, glancing down at my target.

A bit later, I did it again: walked past the feminine hygiene, glanced down at the <sub>23</sub> small box of Tampax Slender Regulars, and then glanced around in all directions, making

sure the coast was clear, and then moving on. Casing the joint. After a few more times of this, I picked up the package, with sweaty hands, and then put it back on the shelf.

This went on for the entirety of my shift. I'm clearly not cut out for shoplifting.

I finally got the cajones to take the package back behind the counter with me, and - hands shaking - I slipped the package into my purse, and immediately thought I'd throw up.

You know what the troubling thing about this story is? This chapter was supposed to be about scrapbooking.

This dark past of mine haunted me for years, and still does, even though I've repaid my debt.

Years later, around 1993 or so, my great-grandmother was in that hospital, taking her final breaths. There for a visit, I walked past the gift shop - my old stomping grounds, and Ground Zero where my shoplifting career began and ended one day many years earlier - and left a \$20 bill "donation," patted the bill softly, and pointed a finger at the girl at the register, giving a little wink and a nod.

Why do people look at me oddly in these situations?