

## Chapter 1 Powerless

This wasn't my first time in a therapist office. I had been in therapy for marriage counseling and had dabbled with suicidal ideation. This was different. It was raining outside and a gloomy day, much like my mood. The office was on the 8th floor of the Mears building in downtown Scranton. I could hear the sounds of traffic from the street below. The office was very inviting with a big overstuffed chair and a couch with lots of pillows. A print of Degas' L'Etoile (The Star) hung on one wall. A lone ballerina on the stage, the stage lighting shining brilliantly onto her pose. A glance to the left and hiding behind the curtain, a foreboding, black figure standing calmly and watchfully. For all the joy the ballerina seemed to exude, a subtle reminder of the darkness in her reality. I was apprehensively waiting to see this psychologist. I was hoping he was not as gruff as the psychiatrist I had to see before I could start therapy. Dr. Boriosi was a well-respected psychiatrist in our area. His bedside manner, however, left something to be desired. I needed to see him for the meds I would need. Then the real work would start. Dr. Lemon entered the room and shut the door gently. We first made some small talk and then summarized my recent stay in Rehab. I had just been released from Marworth Treatment Center for addiction. The psychiatrist at the Rehab told me that I was dual diagnosed and cross-addicted. I guess that meant I can be addicted to anything, which is probably true. The official diagnosis was crossaddiction, chronic depression and anxiety disorder. It was revealed to me that the 20 years I spent in addiction, was a form of self-medication. Until the cure became worse than the illness, and I hit an emotional and spiritual bottom. Dr. Lemon listened very intently. His demeanor suggested he had a very loving, caring soul. He asked me to start with my earliest memory. I said I have many black holes in my memory. Dr. Lemon told me remembering is actually a spiritual experience. We are here on earth to remember our true identity. Memories may come back later or not at all. He said that is okay, just tell me what you can remember. What's your earliest memory? My earliest memory was when I was 5 years old and looking forward to kindergarten. Instead, I, with my brother, was dropped off at an orphanage. Dad took us to this big building with women that were dressed all in black with white around their faces. I later found out it was St. Joseph's Orphanage. Mother Crescentia, Sister of the

Immaculate Heart of Mary had founded it in 1890. There was a growing problem of deserted children in the city of Scranton. Many fathers died in mine accidents and the widows could not take care of the children. There are not many details about the abandonment of these children. This IHM order immediately organized a home for abandoned children and adopted the name, St. Joseph's Society for Orphans. My mother was in the hospital giving birth to my brother Matt, the third sibling. I guess family relationships between us and our maternal grandmother were strained at the time. They felt they had no one to take care of us two, while she was in the hospital. My mother had four sisters who she could have called on to help. Now I know it sounds strange. It's always seemed strange to me. Can you imagine at 5 years old, being left at an orphanage? My father left us with the nuns and said he'd be back in a little bit. Ironically, this was the same orphanage that my father lived in for the first four years of his life. It was really disconcerting when the nuns told us our clothes were too nice compared to the other children. They took our clothes and gave us old tattered clothing. I remember well, because they were scratchy, probably wool. They told us the boys and girls must be separate. They took my brother away. I remember that night sleeping in a bunk bed with another little girl. In the morning we lined up to use the bathroom. Breakfast was thin, watery oatmeal and lunch was a soft-boiled egg and toast. Then we were herded out to the playground. I saw my brother Joe. He ran to me and hugged me so hard, I almost

fell to the ground. The next day my father came to visit us. He brought us each a Hershey bar. The nun took them and said we could have them after dinner. We never saw a piece of those candy bars. Although it felt like an eternity, my parents allege it was only 5 days. For some unknown reason they also decided that I should not go to kindergarten. Whenever I see the poster "All you need to know you learned in kindergarten", I get pissed. I don't remember much of my childhood years after that. I do remember walking home from school with my brother Joe. There was a crossing guard we called Joe the cop, even though he wasn't a cop. He seemed to like us more than the other kids. Anyway, I vaguely remember him inviting us to stop by his house one day after school. We did and he gave us candy. That's all I remember, it seems inconsequential. A few days later he came to our house. He was drunk. He knocked on the door. Told my father that he had a beautiful daughter and that he better take care of her. I remember my father getting very angry and that was it. That's all I remember. At that point in my story, I shrugged my shoulders and let out a sigh. Dr. Lemon took that moment to tell me there was such a thing as disassociated amnesia. Sometimes you have things in your life that you don't want to remember. The brain can just put them in cold storage. "That makes sense" I remarked. Dr. Lemon told me to please continue. Joe and I used to walk home every day from school on Pittston Ave, the main thoroughfare through Southside. We walked the last two blocks to our house alongside Pittston Avenue Cemetery. It was the German Presbyterian Church Cemetery. It had a wall that we would climb up and then walk on top of the wall. At the end of that corner was Brook Street and it was very steep. At the bottom was a creek. Brooks are typically smaller and shallower than creeks. This was a wide and deep body of water, definitely not a brook. I guess "Brook" just sounded nicer. Behind that creek was a wooded area that we called Cow Hill. Joe and I used to love playing on Cow Hill. We built forts and hideaways. We also would like to play in the alleys behind our homes with other neighborhood kids. You mostly stuck to your own block. My house was on Pittston Ave and it was bordered by Brook and Cherry Street and then the bottom street was Cedar Avenue. My brother and I could do anything if we stayed on the block. The weekends in my house were especially nightmarish. On Fridays when we reached home after school, we held our breath and opened the front door. If my father had a glass of beer in front of him, we knew it was going to be hell for the weekend. If there wasn't a glass of beer, we both let out a sigh of relief. My father was a binge drinker. Monday through Friday he would work the night shift at the Capitol Records Factory. Some weekends he would cut grass for people to make extra money. If there was a weekend when there was no grass to cut, then he would prefer to drink. He was jovial for the first couple of hours, but then came the witching hour we all dreaded. We would lay in our beds and wait to see whose name would be called. Usually, he would start with my mother. We would hear them at the kitchen table, mostly hearing my father shouting and pounding the table. Then he would call one of two names. He would either call Marie or Joe. If he called Joe, it was a shorter ordeal, but a horrible hell. At some point I would hear him take off his belt. He would beat my brother and then send him back to bed. If he called Marie, it was a seemingly never-ending hell. He would talk endlessly about his childhood, how he had been wronged and humiliated by his family. After an hour or so, he would look at me and say "If looks could kill I would be dead. There is such hate coming from your eyes". He eventually would fall asleep and I would scurry off to bed. Dr. Lemon asked, "How did all this make you feel when you were a child. Did you think it was normal behavior?" I told him what my parents told me "What happens in your house stays in your house". I never even thought about telling a teacher or a priest. He asked me again, how did that make you feel? I felt powerless.

