

CHAPTER 33

THE GIFT OF INDEPENDENCE

—Finding resiliency after a traumatic event

BY CHRISTINE M. BOORAS

The 4th of July was always one of my favorite holidays of the year and the one in 1990 was to be no exception. The day was to be focused on celebrating our country's independence and witnessing spectacular fireworks, but my highlights were to indulge in more than my share of Bar-B-Q chicken and banana pudding. With visions of sugar-laden desserts swirling in my brain, I set out for a long bicycle ride at two-o'clock in the afternoon in an effort to burn off some pre-buffet calories. The outdoor temperatures exceeded ninety-eight degrees, so my prediction of caloric expenditure was to be accurate. But what I did not anticipate was having an encounter with a stranger that could have ended my life.

While riding my bike on a public road in an affluent subdivision about two miles from my house, my pleasurable outdoor experience was abruptly interrupted when a guy on a motorcycle sped up from behind and kicked me on my low back as he zoomed by. Propelling forward at high speed, I crashed and skidded on the newly paved asphalt road, tumbling violently. The left side of my body took most of the impact and it felt as though fire had erupted on my skin, which ended up being freshly poured asphalt embedding into my arm, head, shoulder and leg.

Lying face-up in a semi-conscious state in the middle of the road, I heard the motorcycle engine stop and footsteps thudding heavily and quickly

in my direction. The motorcyclist had parked and was running back to help me - or so I assumed. I hadn't opened my eyes yet but felt him kneel down at my side. Putting his hand on my abdomen, he whispered, "Are you okay?"

With my eyes still closed, I exhaled with relief. But my relaxed state was short-lived. To my disbelief, the stranger took advantage of my downed state and launched himself on top of me. Aggressively groping and pulling at my biking shorts and tank top, I desperately struggled under him, kicking, squirming and cussing with all my five-foot two-inch body could muster. Pinning my hips with his lower body he was pulling at my clothing but I kept writhing, making it difficult to latch on. Eventually I was able to roll over on my side into a fetal position, trying to protect as much of my body as possible as he sat on top of me fighting to make progress.

His intentions were now very clear: he was trying to rape me - in the middle of the road - in broad daylight.

In twisting under his body my head wound up being directly under his, which was to my advantage. He was still wearing his motorcycle helmet, pressing it against my head, and it gave me something to grab on to. Fumbling frantically, I was able to insert my right hand under the helmet by his face and tugged as hard as I could on the mouthpiece. Surprisingly, my quick jerking motion was enough to forcefully flip him off of me. He landed with a thud about six feet away. Instantly reacting to my freedom, I scrambled to my knees and sprung up like a jack-in-the-box.

I was in a total state of shock and felt numb everywhere, having just been violently knocked off of my bike and then pounced upon like prey while lying in the road. But I was also furious and felt anger spiraling up my spine. Standing as tall as I could and putting hands on both of my hips, I felt my eyes shrink to slits and steam exited both eardrums. I shot dagger-like looks at the punk, now standing directly across from me, and yelled "What is your problem?!"

He paused momentarily, then lunged forward and punched me in the face - twice. It happened so fast I didn't have time to block or deflect his strikes. Again, shock and disbelief. My legs wobbled like rubber bands

and I felt woozy, but I didn't go down. The "flight or fight" response finally kicked in and my body sensed the need to prepare for battle. Throwing both of my hands up like a boxer, we squared off - me and this stranger in the middle of the road. I had no idea what to do but going down like a pansy was not an option.

The attacker just smiled - a sickening little smile from a coward that hid behind his helmet and sunglasses. I started seething and could feel my whole body tightening and blood pressure rising. I wanted to pulverize this guy, but I knew I couldn't. Plus, he had the advantage - I was wounded.

"Keep standing up! Damn it! Stay up! Stand up!" I was now talking to myself aloud, trying to grasp what was happening.

The attacker started hopping around like he was performing in a boxing ring for a cheering crowd, throwing jabs at me that I miraculously redirected or blocked. He had gotten in his first two punches, but I wasn't going to let any more touch me if I could help it. He didn't seem to be trying very hard; just toying with me. But that gave me time to settle my breath and gather my wits. I was trembling violently, and felt exceptionally weak, but a feeling of calmness unexpectedly cascaded over me and I started smiling. The whole situation was bizarre and just plain weird.

Shaking my head back and forth I said aloud, "I can't believe this is happening." He must have thought my comment was amusing too because he started smiling and hopping around, jabbing even more energetically like a tiger playing with its victim.

That *really* pissed me off.

"You're sick!" spewed venomously from my mouth. The stranger paused briefly from his antics and his smile grew wider, showing the space between his two very white front teeth. To my surprise, I reflexively provided a quick kick to his groin while my trembling knees barely held my weight. It felt like I had only brushed a butterfly from my shoe, but the blow was apparently enough to be effective, or he was shocked that I had made contact. Dropping his boxing stance, he just stood there looking at me.

“You’re just sick!” I shouted ferociously. Deliberately pausing, he suddenly lunged towards me and I instinctively jumped back. But it wasn’t me he wanted; it was my stereo headphones that had fallen to the asphalt, knocked off of my head during the scuffle. From five feet away I watched the attacker casually retrieve his consolation prize. Wrapping them around his neck and smiling smugly behind dark glasses, he spun around on his heels and slowly strutted off like a peacock down the street towards his motorcycle. I began fuming at his cockiness and felt flames rising from the hot asphalt under the soles of my feet rushing directly to my head.

“YOU SON OF A BITCH!” I screamed hysterically and started sprinting after him like a crazed cheetah, adrenaline in hyper-drive. I think my aggressiveness and deranged behavior startled him because he started running too, quickly arriving at his motorcycle. I had already slowed my pace after only about twenty yards, knowing that I could never catch him. And I also knew he could come back and finish me off. The attacker had strategically parked his motorcycle far enough away, around a curve and hidden from my view, so obtaining a good description would be impossible. I heard him start his motorcycle and speed off. Remaining still for a few moments, I listened for the high whine of his engine just in case he decided to circle back and give me a little more abuse. For what had seemed like an eternity, not a single car or person came to my aid and it was one of the longest ten minutes of my life.

Pausing for a moment in silence, I stumbled back to my bike which was crumpled and bent in several places from crashing on the asphalt. Lifting it up I began walking towards the main road which was only about fifty yards away. Then it sunk in about what had just happened. Shaking and sobbing, it felt as though my feet weren’t touching the ground and that it was all a dream. I kept saying aloud repeatedly, “This can’t be happening.”

But it was. And it had.

Upon reaching the main road, a car with an elderly couple inside pulled up beside me, rolled down their window and asked if I was okay. Limping along the road with torn and bloodied clothing, it was obvious

that I wasn't and they directed me to a guard gate of the community. It was surreal to see just how close this incident had occurred to where others could have been a witness or heard what was going on. Timing is everything. And you can be in the wrong place at the wrong time - and I certainly was that day.

From the guard gate the police were called and the staff provided me with ice for my swollen face. After about thirty minutes an officer arrived and I began detailing the event to him, which even he had a hard time believing had happened without any provocation on my part. Because it was a physical assault, a detective had to be called in to assist in writing up the report. For the next two hours I provided as many specifics as I could about the attacker, completed the necessary paperwork and then asked for a ride home since my bike was totaled. A police report was filed and the incident was documented as "Attempted Sexual Battery" and I was provided with a copy as a memoir.

After showering, I drove myself to the hospital emergency department where I spent the rest of the evening having the staff perform x-rays and scrape asphalt out of my shoulder, arm and knee where it had been deeply embedded while sliding on the road during my crash. I was given a tetanus shot in one arm and another shot in the other arm and sent on my way. Surrounded by exploding celebratory fireworks that night, I felt thankful to be alive but my nervous system was jacked up to Level Red, wanting just to go somewhere and hide.

The days, weeks, and months to follow were a challenge on not only a physical level but emotionally as well. Especially how I was treated by others. To my surprise, when I would describe what had happened, the most common response I received was, "Well, what do you expect? Riding by yourself? And wearing shorts?"

What? I was shocked by how insensitive people were being, judging me as though I deserved it. Apparently, I should have known better than to venture out alone at two o'clock in the afternoon; to ride my bike by myself on a neighborhood street; to wear shorts and a tank top when it's only ninety-eight degrees outside. Shame on me!

These reactions were disappointing and frustrating, tainting my attitude towards people - how unfair and judgmental some can be. According to

the detective contacting me afterwards from the Sexual Crimes division of our Sheriff's Office, this type of reaction is common when people hear about something bizarre or cruel being done to another person. As human beings we search for a coping mechanism in efforts to rationalize why someone would purposely harm another without being provoked. We have the need to blame someone - and often times it ends up being the victim.

Being an overly-sensitive introvert with extremely low self-esteem most of my life, receiving this criticism and blame for what had happened could have plummeted me down into an emotional abyss. But fortunately, in the early 1980's a friend had introduced me to a self-help program by Brian Tracy entitled "The Psychology of Achievement." The cassette tape program truly changed my life. I had absorbed, practiced and instilled the principles contained within them and they would serve as powerful tools for not only my survival but success. After the attack, I went through ups and downs but listened to his tapes daily for assurance and motivation, finding these five principles to be the most empowering:

- 1. Take 100% responsibility for your life and the choices you make.** I could have said, "Why did this happen to me?" and kept a victim mentality, but realized it would only weaken me. Things happen, and they may not be your fault, but you need to move on with your life. Acceptance of responsibility is not optional: it is mandatory.
- 2. Avoid catching the crippling disease of "excusitis"—it's fatal to success.** We can always come up with reasons why we can't do something, but if you want it bad enough, you will find a way to overcome obstacles.
- 3. Establish personal goals to provide a sense of meaning and purpose.** I set goals for my physical body which gave me self-confidence and strength, pursuing certifications as a Personal Trainer and Group Fitness Instructor. And I started taking Kung Fu, ultimately holding a U.S. Open title and national ranking in the top five of my division during my first year of martial arts

competition. All humans have a success instinct but we must set it free to do the work.

4. **Say “I like myself” several times a day.** It’s not being conceited. It’s about being the person you want to be. Don’t let judgments by others determine who you are.
5. **Stop blaming others for where you are in your life right now and do not accept being blamed by others for their situation.** Responsibility looks to the future and blame looks to the past. The key to ridding yourself of negative emotions is to eliminate blaming others for where you are in your life. Replace blame with “I am responsible”.

July 4th, Independence Day, is the day the United States of America was declared a free nation and is one of celebration. As a human being, I feel we all have the right to be free, no matter what area of the world we live in. We strive for it and too many have died for it. Once we become of legal age, we have the right to do as we choose, and must pay the price and consequences if we make poor choices. Blaming others for our predicaments is futile.

Our current situation is always a result of the choices we have made in our life or have allowed others to make for us. Peace of mind means freedom from fear. We can change our situation, but it takes courage and tenacity. Realizing that we can obtain that peace of mind by taking responsibility for our lives is truly empowering.



About Christine

Christine Booras began her professional career working as a Manager of Human Resources in a corporate environment for Southeast Toyota Distributors, Inc. after graduating from the University of Florida with a Bachelor's degree in Psychology.

Throughout her long-term employment with Toyota she gained valuable experience in conducting training programs, communicating with both salaried and hourly employees, and organizational management. During her tenure with Toyota she also pursued licensing as a Massage Therapist and certifications in personal training and group fitness.

In 1995, she said goodbye to the corporate world and opened her own business offering therapeutic massage and group fitness classes in yoga, Zumba and Tai Chi. In 2005, she added another skill to her professional toolbox and obtained her Florida Real Estate license. She continues to be an agent today, working with Continental Realty of Jax, Inc.

In addition to wellness and real estate, Christine is a published author of various publications and a memoir focusing on personal growth entitled: *Me, My Ferals & I: How a colony of cats freed me to discover the feral within*. Having pets as a child, she has always had a strong bond with animals, wildlife and nature and has volunteered with various animal groups and sanctuaries, including the Jacksonville Zoological Gardens and Marineland in St. Augustine, Florida. She is currently a professional member of the Cat Writer's Association and Dog Writer's Association of America.

Christine's interest in pursuing unique hobbies and physical activities gives her the ability of pulling from a colorful array of past experiences. Staying with the more conservative sports and group activities in her younger days, such as basketball and marching band, she gradually expanded her horizons, venturing into competitive bodybuilding, fencing, K9 Frisbee competitions, Kung Fu, Tai Chi and Iaido (Samurai Sword). She will often include performing Qi Gong movements for stress reduction in her presentations, encouraging audience participation.

THE GIFT OF INDEPENDENCE—FINDING RESILIENCY AFTER A TRAUMATIC
EVENT

After two knee surgeries, Christine is now involved in less physically demanding yet mentally challenging activities – which include shooting traditional archery and playing the Highland bagpipes. Currently a member of both Jacksonville Pipes and Drums and Jacksonville Fire Rescue Department Pipes and Drums, she performs at special events for individuals, corporations and official city and state celebrations. Christine's business has evolved into Dragonfly Warriors, LLC, offering a variety of health and wellness services. With an emphasis on self-empowerment, her eclectic personal experiences and knowledge makes her a well-rounded presenter and guide for individuals pursuing optimum physical, mental and emotional health.

Christine is a native of Jacksonville, Florida where she currently lives with her husband and menagerie of animal companions.

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