

## NARCISSISTIC ABUSE IN YOUR FAMILY OF ORIGIN

*Hi. This is Natalie Hoffman of [Flyingfreenow.com](http://Flyingfreenow.com), and you're listening to the Flying Free Podcast, a support resource for women of faith looking for hope and healing from hidden emotional and spiritual abuse.*

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 32 of the Flying Free Podcast. Today I had a very stimulating conversation with Cherilyn Christen Clough, who is the founder of Little Red Survivor, which is an online support community for survivors of narcissistic and religious abuse. She is also the author of the brand new, hot-off-the-press memoir called "Chasing Eden." We talked about a lot of different things. There are lots of little gems in this conversation. Without any further ado, let's dig in. Cherilyn, welcome to the podcast!

CHERILYN: Hi, Natalie. I'm so excited to be here. I've been listening to your podcast and I've read your book. I'm so excited by the work you are doing, and I'm honored.

NATALIE: I'm really glad that you agreed to come on. I've been reading your blog for a long time. I don't follow very many blogs. In fact, there are less than five blogs that I follow, and yours is one of them. I've been following you for a long time.

CHERILYN: Oh, wow! I'm so honored.

NATALIE: I feel like your blog is this little gem that is kind of hidden. I would like to spend the first part of our podcast talking about your blog so that people know what you write about, so they can find you, and so they can subscribe and hear from you on a regular basis. The name of your blog is Little Red Survivor, which I love! Why is it called Little Red Survivor, and what is your blog about?

CHERILYN: I started looking up the story of Little Red Riding Hood. When I was little I had a red coat, and my mom called me "Little Red." She didn't believe in telling fairy tales. This is the only fairy tale she told me. But when I was thinking about my pain from my childhood, I looked up Little Red Riding Hood on the internet, and I read all the old stories of Little Red.

I found that one of the most ancient stories was a story of a Little Red Riding Hood who saved herself. She didn't need the woodsman or Prince Charming to save her. When she went to the house and recognized the wolf, she decided to make a plan of escape. She asked the wolf if she could use the outhouse. The wolf said, "Sure. As long as you

keep a string tied onto your finger," (so he could keep track of her). So she went to the outhouse, untied the string and tied it to the outhouse door, and made her escape.

I loved that story. It's an old German story and one of the oldest renditions of the story. I love it because Little Red saved herself, and I realize all of us who have had abusive childhoods or abusive marriages – we can save ourselves. So I choose to name my blog Little Red Survivor.

NATALIE: I love that! That is one of the things that I try to teach women – that they have to be their own best advocate. I say that over and over again because, I know at least for me, I was looking for years for someone to rescue me. I kind of took on that I couldn't do anything for myself because "I am a woman and have to be submissive. So I need a mommy or a daddy – like a pastor or someone – to come along and tell me what I can and cannot do." That kept me stuck.

CHERILYN: That's the traditional background that we grew up in, especially in the church where the only people who have communion are men in gray coats. The rest would solemnly sit in the pews while they are up high in the position of honor, when actually the whole idea of communion was to serve each other. But the men are exulted, so as women we are taught to clean up afterwards or put the tablecloth on. We need them. It's like we're supposed to do whatever they direct us to do. That's a sad thing in fundamentalism and Christianity.

NATALIE: It is. When I found your blog, my situation was that I thought I was just in a destructive marriage. I didn't realize at that time the extent of the dysfunction in my family of origin. Your blog helped educate me, because you have a great marriage. Your blog is more about narcissism in general and narcissistic relationships with your family members, is that correct? That's the flavor I get.

CHERILYN: My husband and I both grew up with narcissistic families, and we had a lot of brokenness to deal with. In the first couple of years of our marriage, we almost killed each other. We went to a state fair and saw people tracing their hands on paper plates that said, "These hands will never be used for violence." We realized that we had thrown things at each other and hit each other before. So we traced our hands and made that pledge that our hands would never be used for violence.

That was a turning point very early in our marriage. We were newlyweds, basically, when we saw that. That really woke us up to the fact that we were children of violence who came from families of violence. The truth is that most people who grew up in a narcissistic home will often marry a narcissistic spouse, because that was what love

looked like. We don't know better until we learn better, like Maya Angelou said.

NATALIE: Right. But neither one of you was narcissistic, you just were survivors, and...

CHERILYN: No, but you know, I'm going to shock you. Maybe you don't know the whole story, because my husband is bisexual, and he felt like he could only marry a woman, so he married me. He loved me. I was his best friend. He thought I was cute, but he also was attracted to men. That was a very hard thing in the early part of our marriage, because the church is screaming at you that the only way you are accepted is if you are completely straight and in a straight marriage. We always had that undercurrent. So that was the biggest thing – that he felt like he couldn't be authentic.

He came out a couple of years ago. We're still married and going on thirty years this year. It's because we love each other and we're best friends. But we've decided not to judge anyone where they are at, whether they stay with someone or not. Many people may think, "That's terrible!" It's a bad topic and I hope I didn't just wreck your podcast by mentioning that, but we have to be honest with where people are coming from. People remember, from their childhood... They know nothing but what they are attracted to, and we can't really control that for them. I can't control that for my husband. I just let him be himself, but we have an honest, monogamous relationship. For thirty years we've had each other's back. But we had to learn conflict resolution and to treat each other with respect always.

NATALIE: In your marriage, though, there are two people who are working hard to make that happen.

CHERILYN: Yes. Absolutely.

NATALIE: It's not a one-sided thing, and that's what is important. So when you bring up things or when one person gives feedback to the other, the other person considers that, respects that, gives you a place where your voice is heard and where you are respected as an individual in your own right. Even the fact that you respect your husband where he's coming from, he's still a human being with a right to have his own perspective on life. And you respect that and give him a safe place to land.

CHERILYN: Yeah, and I think that neither one of us was the narcissist in our family. We were the empaths in our family. So I was lucky in that sense.

NATALIE: That's beautiful.

CHERILYN: But many people listening might say, "Well, what's wrong with me that I married a narcissist? I should have known because my dad was a narcissist, or my mom was a narcissist." The bottom line is that you can't always recognize that when you are young and you get married, especially if you don't know what narcissism is to begin with. I didn't even know what narcissism was until a few years ago.

NATALIE: No. All of that kind of information has just been exploding in recent years. Back when we were growing up, and even the young people today (I've got kids who are in their twenties, and they are learning it because of their experience) still don't know. I think there needs to be a class that everyone takes in junior high and high school that teaches dysfunctional relationship issues and how to handle yourself and maintain who you are as a person in spite of the way that others might define you or treat you. That's a skill that everyone needs to learn.

So we just kind of throw ourselves under the bus. People who grew up in families like that, who are empaths, throw themselves under the bus and let narcissistic types of people run the show. They don't really know what to do about that. But there are skills that anyone can learn, even if you are a quieter, more passive person, so you can stand up for yourself.

CHERILYN: Yeah. I would say the first one of those is understanding your boundaries. Dr. Henry Cloud, the author of the book "Boundaries," says that boundaries are where you begin and I end. If I don't know where I end and my husband begins, we can't have good boundaries. We both have to know the beginning and the ending of me and what I'm capable of.

The issue with empaths is that we want to help everyone and serve everyone. We feel for them before we feel our own feelings sometimes. A narcissist loves nothing more than to find and target an empath – an empathetic person who they can use to do what they want. Many of us who are empathetic have been used by narcissistic people. I've heard that narcissists will choose an empath to marry because then they can be heard in everything they say and do anything they want.

NATALIE: Yeah, it works for them.

CHERILYN: That's basically what my website... I started it when I began my deconstruction. I first wrote a religious website trying to help people understand that the Old Testament shouldn't be taken so literally. Then I learned about narcissism, but by that time my parents were barely speaking to me. Someone invited me to join a Facebook group for adult children of narcissistic parents. I didn't even join it right away.

I ignored it.

The first time I went there was the night before my 50th birthday. I went there and realized these people were telling the same kind of stories that I had in my story. We had so much in common. It looked like someone had taken a script, and all our parents were copying off the same script. The next day, which was my birthday, I was going on a trip with my husband. The sky was so beautiful at dawn, and I was drinking my coffee. I realized that I was free because I knew that it wasn't about me anymore. That's why I started writing my website about narcissism, because I realized that other people could be freed too.

NATALIE: Yes. So if someone was going to go over to your blog for the first time, where would you tell them to start? (We will put these links in the show notes as well.)

CHERILYN: It's pretty easy for them to find anything on a topic that they want because of the format that I have my blog in. My blog is listed so that if you are looking up a topic, you can search by looking up "Flying monkeys," "Narcissist," "Memoir," "Dysfunctional families..." What I call "Religious narcia" is narcissism dressed up in snarky religious clothes. You know the church is full of it, don't you? Many people have stuff under that. Another topic is "Equality," because I believe that women and men are equal.

At the top of my blog there are all these topics. You don't have to do a search. You can just click on "Forgive," and everything that has forgiveness will be there. That forgiveness will explain to you that it is not just about "forgiving and forgetting" like the narcissists will tell you, but it is about what it means to truly forgive in God's way. All those topics that they click on will bring up all of the blogs that are on that topic.

NATALIE: Do you know what your most shared or most beloved blog post of all time has ever been?

CHERILYN: Yes.

NATALIE: What is it?

CHERILYN: My most famous blog posts are "A Flying Monkey By Any Other Name is Still a Frickin' Flying Monkey," or "Three Ways to Disable Flying Monkeys." People really are struggling with people who come after them that the narcissist sends to take them down. Another one is "How to Deal with Narcissistic Word Salad." People really care about that one: I don't know why, but that one triggered a lot of people. These have

been shared thousands and thousands of times. Shahida Arabi...

NATALIE: Yes. I love her.

CHERILYN: She picked it up and put it in an article of hers, and it's gone around the world over and over again. Often it will say, "Your stats are up," and it's that "Narcissistic Word Salad" post. People just like that one. But I would say the flying monkeys posts are the ones most people come to along with narcissistic abuse, because a lot of people realize what a narcissist is. They realize that person was abusive to them, but they don't know what to do with the flying monkeys who come behind. The wound first comes from the narcissist and all the belittling things they say.

I listened to your podcast the other day of the woman who wrote that poem about pain. Oh my goodness! That ripped my heart out. I just bawled listening to it because I know what that feels like, not from my husband, but through my parents. You keep thinking you are crazy all the time. Then when all the flying monkeys come after you (that name comes from "The Wizard of Oz" where the witch sent out all the flying monkeys), those are the siblings or the people who support the narcissist, that is reinforcement for the narcissist.

Their cutting remarks are sometimes more damaging than what the narcissist did, because you knew the narcissist was a jerk, but then you didn't expect your sister would be. Not your favorite sister who you love with all your heart, who you just sent a birthday present to, and she just trashed you.

NATALIE: Exactly! The narcissist will say (I know mine did), "You know, Natalie has problems with her mother and her sister. She has relationship problems with her daughter." (I have a daughter who has emerging borderline personality disorder. I've got nine kids, but one of them has this issue. Yeah, I have problems with her, but so does everyone else.) "She's also had problems with her pastor." (He abused me in many different ways.) He would say, "She has all these different problems. What's the common denominator? Natalie." That makes you feel like, "Oh my gosh! Maybe I am the problem." You've been told that your whole life, that you are the problem. It's extremely traumatizing.

CHERILYN: Let's unpack what happened there, because I'm a person who's been told since I was a little kid, "If everyone else has a problem with you, then you must be the problem."

NATALIE: Yes!

CHERILYN: But the reality is if there's a narcissist who is going along talking about you to everyone, or maybe when you came against abuse you stood up for it, the bottom line is that there is a saying that "Well-behaved women don't make history." Well-behaved women don't make history because they just bend to whatever people want them to do. But if you want to be a woman who makes history, you're going to have to fight the lies. You're going to have to stand up for truth.

When you do that, there's always going to be opposition and resistance. There's no way you aren't going to have resistance if you stand up for the truth. Sometimes the first truth we must stand up for is ourselves and our family of origin, ourselves and our marriage, or ourselves with our pastor. I've had some crazy abusive pastors myself. I've seen horrible things happen, not necessarily to me. I've just been an eyewitness. I stood up to tell the truth.

I once walked in on a pastor who was having sex with a girl in his office. She had just come to the church to learn about God. She was twenty, and he was in his fifties. Because I told the truth, the conference president said, "Well, it will probably be your word against his." I said, "What is the difference between my word against his? I actually saw him with his pants off." That's creepy! That's not how you want to see your pastor. Why would they believe this man who would only be their pastor for another nine months?

Honestly, the truth is stranger than fiction. When we try to tell the truth, people fight us. I know that I was right. It wasn't my fault that I walked in on it. It was an accident. Then he had the nerve... He had to give me a ride home. It was so awful, because I got a ride with the pastor. They both gave me a ride home and said, "Well, if you want to help us again, let us know." I waited until I was out of the car and then I slammed the door and said, "I don't think so!"

NATALIE: Unbelievable! That is so absolutely bizarre.

CHERILYN: He was a psycho-pathological liar.

NATALIE: He was. The level of denial there is just insane.

CHERILYN: When people say we are liars, usually they are reflecting the narcissist. So we just can't care. We can't care what flying monkeys say.

NATALIE: That's right. I want to shift gears a little bit because I want to talk about your book. You have a new book out. Have you ever written a book before, or is this your



very first book?

CHERILYN: I helped edit a book called "Servant God," which was published by a large university press. I was just an editor, and I wrote two chapters in it. So I'm listed as an author on that, but it wasn't really my baby. That project I just joined. Then I put out my grandparents' love letters, which we found one hundred years later. They told the whole story of their romance. It's "Love Letters 1909." I published that five years ago, but that wasn't really my writing. This is the first time I've written my own book that's about me and my story.

NATALIE: Okay. I'm about halfway through it. It's very well written. I love it. It reminds me of Tara Westover's memoir, "Educated," which was my personal favorite book of last year – and I read a lot of books.

CHERILYN: Yeah, that was mine too.

NATALIE: I can relate to a lot of what you talk about in your book as well. Not all of it, but one of the things that intrigued me about your book... Actually, there are two things. One thing is that you expose in a beautiful way the subtleties of narcissistic abuse. It's not always the raging and the beating. There was some of that in your story, but there are also a lot of subtle things. You've woven them in there in a very gracious way.

The second thing goes along with that. It is actually very gracious towards your family even though they've done these things. You beautifully show that these are people with depth. They have character flaws. They are real human beings. There is a good side to them, and there are a lot of good things that they did and brought into your life. Then there is this dark side for whatever reason. Those things they just weren't able to get a hold of, and that spilled over into how they treated you. Why don't you tell us a little bit about that?

CHERILYN: I'm so honored that you are getting that. That's what I want people to hear, because I love my mother and my father. They are still alive. They are in their eighties. I have no desire to hurt them. But at the same time, this is the story that we lived thirty years ago. I wanted to tell the truth because I wanted to live an authentic life, to be myself, and to own my story. At the same time, my goal isn't to damage them.

Narcissistic people look at everything as black and white. They like to turn people into villains. They scapegoat one person. Right now I'm the scapegoat in the family. A few years ago it was my brother who was the scapegoat because he became an atheist.



Whoever is the person they are against at the time becomes the scapegoat. When someone becomes the scapegoat, they cannot see anything good about them. Well, I am not a narcissist. I don't want them to look scapegoated.

I realize there are nuances of all kinds of things in our lives. All of us have good and bad traits. None of us are perfect and none of us are totally demonic. I just wanted to show the truth of who my parents were, who they were as I was a child, and the journey of the events they went through that formed them to become the people that they became, just as the events in my life formed me. We all get to choose how we allow these events to form us: If we want to embrace truth or we want to keep hiding. I've chosen to embrace truth, I believe, probably a little more than they have; but at the same time, I wanted to tell the story.

I heard a teenager who was abused say, "If you have a really mean, nasty stepmother who never does anything nice for you, then it's easy to see her as a villain. But if you have a loving parent who also abuses you, that's really hard to figure out as a child." That's how it was for me. I had a covert mother and a more malignant father in the way that their narcissism played out. I asked my husband, "Which of my parents is a narcissist?" He said, "They are like two death stars spiraling around each other." They both have their own game that they play in the gaslighting. Get them together and they are powerful when you are trying to figure out the truth.

But the love was still there when I was younger. I think the love is still there sometimes, but I think they are damaged and don't even know how to express love. So my choice was to just try to tell it like it was and give them grace. I hope I'm able to do that. I want honor and honesty, because the root word for "honor" is "honesty." I can't honor them unless I can be honest. At the same time, that honesty also includes the good things they did. I heard that teenager say, "It's like mixed vegetables. You like the corn, but you don't want the lima beans." That's what it's like growing up with a parent that's abusive and loves you at the same time.

NATALIE: Oh, I love that. That's a great picture.

CHERILYN: You glean the love from them and then you hide when you know that they're not in a good mood.

NATALIE: Yep. We forgot to say what the name of your book is.

CHERILYN: Oh. "Chasing Eden: A Memoir."

NATALIE: "Chasing Eden." I love the name. That reminds me of Sara Bareilles' song "Eden." Have you ever heard Sara Bareilles?

CHERILYN: Yeah, and I had this name, "Chasing Eden," all my life, practically, because my dad has been always saying, "Let's build our own garden of Eden and live off of the land and wait for Jesus to come." We were always trying to live in this utopia. Many Christians have done this – fundamentalist-prepper families. You find this in a lot of fundamentalist Christian groups. They're waiting for Jesus to come. Some stockpile weapons. We didn't stockpile weapons, but the mindset was that we need to grow our own food, can all this food, and dry all this food. That way when we need to run from the time of trouble, we will have all this extra food.

Like Tara Westover said in her book, "Educated," no one ever explains what you are going to do with all this stuff, but they have lots of peaches. My family was more chaotic because my dad could never stay in one place. At least Tara's family stayed in one place.

NATALIE: Yeah, how do you transport all that stuff everywhere you go?

CHERILYN: We did a few times. Other times we just gave up and we didn't have stuff. But that was also leading to the despair because then it was, "Oh no! We're not ready. We don't have a place of our own to grow all this stuff." So chasing Eden became a burden.

NATALIE: I can relate to some of that too. A lot of Christians used the whole Y2K thing saying Jesus was going to come around Y2K and the whole world was going to fall apart. I'm embarrassed to say that I fell into that. I was very steeped in fundamental Christianity. I was raised in a somewhat similar family. My family was not as unstable as I would describe your family, but there was still the idea that Jesus was going to come back before you grew up. There was a shopping mall going up in my hometown, and my mom's best friend told all of us that, "Jesus is going to come back before that mall gets built." That mall not only got built, but now it's actually closing and may be torn down.

CHERILYN: That happened to us too in Walla Walla. The mall that was the brand-new mall has goats living on the land now – weeds growing up all over and goats running around. It's hilarious. So much for Jesus coming, right?

NATALIE: Exactly. It's not that we wouldn't welcome Jesus coming back. It's just that you can't live your life like that. Also, the idea that there is this small group of Christians that

is going to escape and then God is going to burn everybody else forever and ever in all eternity... It's a very frightening concept.

CHERILYN: What a cool dream. It takes away the understanding of God being like Jesus.

NATALIE: Exactly. In fact, to that point, I will say that one of the most healing things that I did (and I've read through the Bible every year since I was a child) was that a couple of years ago, I just focused on the gospel of John because I just wanted to get to know Jesus. I thought I had to throw everything else out right now and just figure out who Jesus was, how did He live His life, and if I want to be a follower of His, what would that actually look like? I read that book over and over about twenty times, and it was so healing.

CHERILYN: I think that's my favorite book of the Bible.

NATALIE: Yeah, I love that book. It cleared so many things up for me. Then I had to figure out what to do with the Old Testament. I was just telling Cherilyn before we started doing this podcast that I'd put in a plug for another podcast called "Almost Heretical." If you are listening to this podcast now and you are hearing things that you think are almost heretical and you like that, you should head over to the "Almost Heretical Podcast." Start at the beginning. They have over seventy episodes, but start at the very beginning, because they lay a foundation for the Old Testament. It's fascinating.

CHERILYN: That sounds awesome. I'm going to listen to it.

NATALIE: I know. I've been binge listening this last week. I can't stop. For anyone who is listening and is wondering if this is a Christian podcast if this is your first time here, if you listen to my other podcasts you will realize that, yes, this is a Christian podcast. I am a lover of Jesus Christ. I bow to Jesus Christ alone, and so does Cherilyn, and we are all about being the hands and feet of Christ in this world and "What does that look like? How do we spread the good news and love of Jesus in this world?"

That doesn't look like oppressing other people groups – women or any kind of people group – because Jesus was not about oppressing people. I was excommunicated from John Piper's church, and to me, that's oppression. Do you think that's oppression?

CHERILYN: You have a badge of honor, my dear.

NATALIE: I know, and I wear it like a badge of honor too. I actually love it that they

excommunicated me.

CHERILYN: Praise God!

NATALIE: I think it was God rescuing me and revealing the reality of what was actually going on over there. If I had just left... I left two years before they excommunicated me. Then they chased me to the next church that I was going to and had talks with the elders there and tried to get them to get rid of me even though I wasn't a member (and will never become a member of another church again). That's my story, but I want to get back to yours.

CHERILYN: I want to point out that this is the controlling of the patriarchy. John Piper and Grudem started the Danvers Statement back in the 80s. The Danvers Statement was to work against equality for women. It was to say that they believed in compatibility – it might as well be compliance – because they say that women are equal but different. That means that “Women are equal, but they should bow down and do what we ask them because we're the men in charge.”

Then they started the Nashville Statement a couple of years ago. That group has done more to oppress people in Christian churches than probably any other group because of their false teachings. They do not embrace equality of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. They all serve each other. They are all one God serving in unity, serving each other, and that's how we should be. It's very false doctrine that John Piper has.

NATALIE: It reminds me of the book “Animal Farm” where they said, “All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.” It just doesn't work that way. What happened in that book (if anyone is listening who has never read it – read it) is that the animals that are more equal than the other ones take power and oppress the other ones. That's exactly what is happening in the church through this kind of theology.

CHERILYN: Yeah.

NATALIE: You said something before we got on the podcast, Cherilyn, that I wanted you to share. It was the verse that talks about how we are going to overcome the world. You shared that it took you seven years to write this memoir, which I find fascinating. I've talked to a lot of women who've said, “I want to write my memoir.” I've thought of that myself, but most of us don't really know, as I told you before, how to write a memoir, and will anyone even believe it? I know my family will say, “That's not true.” But you brought up a Bible verse that talks about how we are going to overcome the world, and

you tied it into writing your own story. Can you talk about that?

CHERILYN: Yeah. I think I learned this from Dan Allender. I was listening to one of his podcasts, and he was talking about how Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and all the people in his family had great dysfunctional stories which were told in the Bible. If we did not have their dysfunctional stories, we wouldn't have the Bible as we know it. He talked about how they each overcame, and in Revelation 12:11 it says, "They triumphed over him," (and they are talking about the dragon or the evil in the world), "by the blood of the Lamb," (it says in Leviticus that the blood is the life – so the life of Jesus), "and by the word of their testimony." That's the part that I highlighted in yellow with big letters around it in my Bible. We triumph by the word of our stories, by telling our story and owning our story honestly. That's how we triumph over evil in this world.

NATALIE: I love that!

CHERILYN: That gave me new confidence that yes, God was calling me to write my story. It's not just some ego trip for me to write this book, but this is actually ordained by God to tell my story. It's just as true for you and anyone else who wants to write a story.

NATALIE: You were talking about a memoir that you read many years ago that kind of inspired you along these lines and also inspired you about the flavor of your memoir – how you wanted it to be. Can you talk about that?

CHERILYN: That was "The Glass Castle" by Jeannette Walls. It is, to me, the queen of all memoirs in the modern genre as far as I am concerned (although Tara Westover's book "Educated" is pretty close). I believe that Jeannette Walls inspired me. Someone heard my story and told me to read her book. I read her book and cried and cried, because I realized she wrote with love for her parents and still showed the abuse. She didn't write with hate. It wasn't a rant.

Sometimes people who have been through narcissistic abuse, they aren't sure what to do with it, so they say, "I wrote a story," and they self-publish it, and it's a rant. I've read a whole bunch of memoirs in the last few years, like you said you have, and you probably know those kinds of memoirs. You are reading them, and they are the "Mommy Dearest" memoir. It's just like, "Blah, blah, blah. She was so evil and so mean." You are exhausted from just looking at it.

I didn't want to write a story like that. I wanted to tell a real story that showed good and bad and happiness and beauty along the way too. Jeannette Walls did that. She

patterned that for me. After her book came out, there was an interview on Facebook that said, "You can ask Jeannette a question." I asked her, "What would be your advice to me who wants to write my own memoir now that I am inspired by you?" She said, "I will give you my mother's words: 'Tell the truth.'" My mother would not tell me to tell the truth. My mother was the one who orchestrated all the lies in our family. She really was an architect of lies. She comes up with all kinds of stuff – spends hours trying to figure out the best way to convince someone of something.

When Jeannette Walls, whose mother just plain let her, said "Tell the truth" even though it would make her look bad, I thought, "Wow. I'm going to take that. I'm going to tell the truth." Thank you, Jeannette Walls. Thank you to Muriel Walls, her mother, for letting her daughter be free to tell her story. I believe that God is a mother and a father, and God says to us, "Tell the truth," because Jesus says, "I am the truth."

People say, "Do you know the truth?" and then they talk about their doctrine like it's the truth. I was raised in a church that said, "We have the truth." They always talked about their doctrines. But Jesus said, "I am the truth." When Jesus is the truth, He stands on the side of the truth and He stands on the side of the truth-tellers. So I'm no longer afraid to tell the truth. Jesus has my back, and He has your back too. If you are out there listening and you want to write a memoir and you're afraid, just ask Jesus to show you how to do it, because He has your back.

NATALIE: Right, and I love how the truth is not just all bad and it's not just all good. There's going to be a mixture in all our stories of beautiful things and not so beautiful things. The truth is going to be honest and real about all those things.

CHERILYN: We live in a world full of good and evil, and it's all around us. We get to pick what we focus on, but our stories are a mixture of good and evil.

NATALIE: We're going to wrap up here. Is there anything else that was burning on your heart that you wanted to say in this podcast that I maybe left out, or do you feel like this is a good place to end?

CHERILYN: I think I would just like to leave hope for anyone out there who is struggling with their family, because the pain is so intense when you are rejected by your family. I know that, and I don't live in sadness. I don't wake up and cry every day. But there was a time when I did, and it's because when I realized that I cannot change narcissistic people – it's impossible to change them – I had to release them, let them go, and let God take care of them.

The chips will fall where they may about my memoir or anything else I do in my life, because I'm not living my life through the lens of what a narcissist expects from me anymore. They asked me to play a game I could never win. When I realized that the narcissist was never going to change, I was able to let go, and that's where the freedom comes. The freedom comes with letting go.

NATALIE: Yep. I can totally relate to that. To let go, you have to see that truth first. You have to accept it. It's hard to accept it, the truth. But once you see that, letting go is so important. Thank you for that.

CHERILYN: I was honored. Thank you.

NATALIE: Oh, you are so welcome. Thank you. For those of you who are listening, if you are a person of faith and the subjects that we are talking about here are important to you, please feel free to share. Also, go over to Apple Podcasts, find the Flying Free Podcast, and leave a rating and a review. That is what helps other people to find this podcast. I think we're done, so until next time, fly free!