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Candice Schutter: Welcome to the Deeper Pulse and the 'cult'ure series.

It's so hard to believe this is the last episode of 2022, and that we've already spent 10 episodes exploring what puts the cult in culture and laying the foundation for conversations that are gonna carry us into the new year. Courageous conversations, like the one I'm about to share with you today.

First, an important heads up. This episode contains descriptions of traumatic events, including reference to physical and sexual abuse, as well as candid discussions surrounding suicide and mental illness.

My guest today is a friend and an [00:01:00] inspiration. Trina Studebaker is a mother, a musician, a dancer, an avid plant lover, and a cult survivor.

Her first experiences with coercive control were as a young girl, and she carried the emotional scars, the shame, the secrecy with her into adulthood. She eventually found music and fellowship in the Christian fundamentalist cult that she and her family devoted their lives to for 14 years.

This conversation is a candid confessional in which Trina bravely shares details about life in the cult, what drew her in, the regret she's still reckoning with, and how tending to her mental health in recent years has freed her to finally share her story with all of us.

Trina is one of the bravest people I know. She has an unflinching relationship to hard truths. She sometimes calls herself a missionary because she believes that when we share difficult [00:02:00] truths, we destigmatize the challenges we all face, giving one another permission to share the whole of ourselves.

And I couldn't agree more.

There is so much pain and beauty contained in this heartfelt conversation, and I can't wait to share it with you.

Please note the stories and opinions shared in this episode are based on personal experience and are not intended to malign any individual, group, or organization.

Trina Studebaker: It's good to see you.

Candice Schutter: It's so good to see you too. I'm so glad that you agreed to do this and it's just such a great excuse to connect.

Trina Studebaker: Yes. Always.

I was noticing something really interesting this morning. I mean, with everything that I've been through in my life, I've been like an open book with people. Um, [00:03:00] because when you've been through so much, at least for me, I have so much compassion for others and it's like if sharing part of my story will help someone, even if it's a little bit, I'm gonna do it.

So, um, then this morning, I still found myself nervous. I mean, that's the gist of it.

Candice Schutter: Well, I think anytime we, and I'll speak for myself, anytime I feel like I am tapping into another layer, even if I'm sharing the same story, there's a new sort of tremor inside, a new sort of nervousness. There's always new layers. And so when you tell a story, especially on a podcast called The Deeper Pulse, you know that we're probably gonna tap into some of that. So I think, I think it's really healthy to feel a little bit nervous before we reveal ourselves. Like there's something that's letting us know like this, this is an edge worth, [00:04:00] exploring.

Trina Studebaker: You know, it definitely is. And I've got Kleenex ready because you never know.

Candice Schutter: Always. Me, too.

Trina Studebaker: Yeah. You never know when you're gonna tap into something and, but for me it feels like it's just an opportunity for deeper healing, you know?

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm. Yes.

Trina Studebaker: I do. I very

Candice Schutter: much

Trina Studebaker: And damn, I'm all for that.

Candice Schutter: Well, and that's really one of the main reasons why I invited you. I mean, your story is compelling and as you know, I'm not interested in creating trauma porn. It's not about that, right? It's about connecting with people who really understand and experience as I do, and this isn't necessarily true for everyone, nor should it be, but who really had the experience of self-expression as a vehicle for healing and a vehicle to reconnect to greater authenticity and to be more of who we really [00:05:00] are. And I have watched you over the years that we've known each other doing a similar practice in terms of revelation. And so I thought, well, this is just meant to be.

Trina Studebaker: It's so true. Yeah, so true. I really felt that. I've listened to every episode in the 'cult'ure series; and, you know, immediately I was like, I've gotta message Candice and say, Hey, guess what? You know, I was in a cult, too.

Candice Schutter: And you know, I love that you led with that because for the listeners, I really want to underscore how you never know, like I've known you for a number of years and I didn't know this part of your history, and it's not something that we talk about in the mainstream, which is part of what we're trying to change.

And.

Trina Studebaker: Exactly.

Candice Schutter: When you sent me that message, you were one of the people early on who messaged me and boldly, and actually used the four letter word, which people are sometimes scared [00:06:00] of.

Trina Studebaker: Yes.

Candice Schutter: I was in a cult. Right?

Trina Studebaker: But you know, call what it is.

Candice Schutter: Right. Mm-hmm.

Trina Studebaker: It was a fucking cult.

And it still is.

Candice Schutter: I can't wait. It still exists?

Trina Studebaker: It still exists.

Candice Schutter: It still exists, So I'm really looking forward to sharing more about that with the listeners. And I'd love to start with just going back, because what I'm finding in my own journey of cult recovery is that a lot of what I'm experiencing, and I just said it in the present tense because I still struggle with cult dynamics in relationships and groups that I'm in.

Trina Studebaker: Absolutely.

Candice Schutter: Is really, yeah, it's really kind of a, an amplification of certain dynamics that were present from my youth, which really is what inspired this as the 'cult'ure series and not a series about cults.

It's about culture in general and how these dynamics are present from birth in our lives, and so I know that you get [00:07:00] that, and I would love if you would be willing for you to start at the very beginning and just give us a general sense of what it was like for you growing up and anything that you feel like sharing in that vein. you open to that?

Trina Studebaker: Well like you know, I've been an open book, you know, and the thing that's beautiful about that is I, I don't feel shame about my story anymore. Because it's part of my story and talking about it, helping to get rid of stigma around all kinds of things. Mental health, cuz I have mental health problems and the cult issue and trauma. Uh, you know, so.

I guess I would start with like, the foundation, I think for my story is my dad is a recovering alcoholic. And he got sober when I was four. And he had been in recovery [00:08:00] for, I think it was like three or four years I guess.

And, he had this opportunity to open up the first residential treatment center for recovering addicts and alcoholics in Coos County, Oregon. And so, my dad, he's really open about his story and helping others. And part of being in AA recovery is giving back to your community. It also helps you with your own journey. So he opens up well, and my mom, they did this together, through the county. And it was this beautiful sprawling ranch piece of property out in the country, and I mean, the setting was just gorgeous.

And this is back in the early seventies. So this situation would never happen today, but our family lived there [00:09:00] with the recovering alcoholics and addicts. We lived there and my dad was busy, like being the manager, counselor, and just the general running of the place, the management.

And then my mom was cooking and cleaning. And I was eight, my sister was six, and we were two cute little girls. And you know, back then there weren't helicopter parents. And we were just left to run around on our own out in the country, and which, you know, a lot of that I absolutely freaking loved. Um, the trees I climbed and I like, I still have such fond memories of climbing trees. And like, as a child, that was one of my very favorite things to do. But at the same time, I would climb the trees to get away from the man who was [00:10:00] sexually assaulting me.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Trina Studebaker: And I have a clear memory. I had climbed this one tree, and I fell out of it, and I hit my back on a branch on the way down. I was unconscious. And I woke up to the man who was sexually assaulting me, standing over me. He carried me in as if he was this big fucking hero. So that, that abuse went on for quite some time. Um, and my sister and I had hiding places. We, there were big, just lots and lots of blackberry bushes and we had carved out tunnels. Cause this guy was really big. He was way over six feet tall and he couldn't get in where we would hide.

And I never told anybody. And I, I [00:11:00] don't remember why. I don't remember if he threatened my family. I don't have any memory of that. But what I do have a memory of is how my body responded. And how my body, kind of, locked down.

And by the time I was 11, I had a full on eating disorder of anorexia, and the self-loathing that happened as a result of that was... that eating disorder, it absolutely consumed me.

And I was, I was a straight A student. People considered me a goodie two shoes and always following all the rules, never causing any trouble. But in my mind, the eating disorder was consuming me, and I would have periods of time where I was more stable than others.

And again, back [00:12:00] then we didn't have help for that kind of thing.

Uh, I would have nightmares, of this man. And, there was a period of time I was, I was about 11 and strangely enough, we lived on East 11th Street, funny how you remember, little things like that. And my, there was this period of time where my dad would, he would hold my hand while I cried myself to sleep every night cuz I was afraid to go to sleep because of the nightmares.

And so my dad was, he was trying to be as supportive as he could, you know, and again, they didn't know what was happening. I mean, they knew I was in trouble, but they didn't know what to do about it.

So, about that time, we lived kitty corner from an Assembly of God church.

And that's when we got saved, [00:13:00] as they call it in the Christian world. You know, accepting Jesus as your savior. We bought in big time.

Candice Schutter: So had you moved away from the ranch and were no longer creating this recovery community? Had you had left the ranch.

Trina Studebaker: Yeah, we had left. I don't remember if my dad needed a real job.

Candice Schutter: Uhhuh, right.

Trina Studebaker: But we moved a lot when I was a kid. I don't even know where I went to school in second grade. My dad had an issue with keeping a job and, you know, part of his recovery was his own journey in the middle of trying to support a family. And my mom stayed at home. She ended up doing babysitting at our house.

Then I had gone off to bible school after I graduated from high school. I played piano and I was [00:14:00] training to be a classical pianist. And I had gone to a private Christian school near Santa Cruz, California.

And, the eating disorder that, like my sophomore year is when it got really, really bad, like the peak. And so I'm anorexic. I'm filled with self-loathing. I am suicidal. And here's this man that shows up, so charming. Oh my God, was he charming and giving me gifts all the time. And you know, I fell hard. I got engaged to this man who ended up abusing me in every way you can think. So I was engaged to him when I went back my sophomore year.

And after a period of time you know, the abuse didn't start right away, but it escalated. [00:15:00] And I was with him for at least a year and the sexual abuse and the other abuses that he did, they were taking a toll.

And I really took a nose dive with the anorexia to the point where the therapist that I was seeing at the school gave me a choice. He gave me a choice of either going into the hospital or going home to Oregon. And at that point, I wasn't about to go into a hospital because I, I knew that they would make me eat, and that was the last thing I was gonna do. And so I went home to Oregon, and I was emaciated. My skin was yellow from damaging my liver. And the doctors said I would never be able to have children because of the damage that was done. And you know, looking back, it was slow suicide. It's like I was separate from [00:16:00] my body. Like, there was me and then there was my body. And I hated my body so much.

When I got engaged to this guy, I was going to their church and it was like a little more crazy. So I went from The Assembly of God to this other church. It was extreme. The Bible was worshiped in and of itself.

And then, strangely enough, my ex-husband was best friends with the man I was engaged to.

Candice Schutter: So the man that you would end up being with after? They were friends. And they were both a part of this organization.

Trina Studebaker: Yes. And my ex-husband was going to be the best man in our wedding,

Candice Schutter: Okay.

Trina Studebaker: Yeah. Yeah. You can't make this shit up. Right?

So, [00:17:00] so then I get involved with him, and his family found this new church up in Portland that was like the next best thing, and we had gotten married, and we ended up moving up to Portland. And by this time we had a one-year-old.

And, you know, when you've come from a place of a lot of trauma, you are seeking anything that's gonna help. Right? And so there's a vulnerability that happens. And I felt like they were gonna help me so much. You know, there's a scripture that talks about being new creatures in Christ. And I was like, yes, that's what I want. I don't want that other person that I had loathed.

And at that point I still loathed. I was still, like, at the beginning of my marriage, I was still anorexic. And, um, managing it. It was manageable. You know, I [00:18:00] wasn't jaundice anymore. But I, I was very thin and, oh yeah. And I ended up having two kids. So.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Trina Studebaker: Miracles or I guess, um.

Candice Schutter: Your resilient body through all that trauma was still able to create life.

Trina Studebaker: Right. Wow. It's the, the human body is so resilient. resilient. And, you know, I wanna add, I am fucking tired of being resilient.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. Mm-hmm. . Yeah. Yeah.

Trina Studebaker: And so we, we moved to Portland, and when you're in the Christian world, and this, this is extreme fundamentalist Christianity at this point that I'm talking about. And, I play piano and they latch onto you so fast when you have a talent [00:19:00] like that. And so before long I was using my gifts for God and playing the piano almost every Sunday. And then we became part of the worship team. And cuz this, this was a I guess, contemporary, you know, we got a full band for our worship time. My ex-husband played the trumpet and we both sang and just a hundred percent I gave. I gave a hundred percent. I wanted to be pleasing to God. And that meant a lot of sacrifice.

And so Sunday, we had church in the morning. Church in the evening. Then Wednesday night we had church. And then like a Tuesday or Thursday we would've bible study in our home. And Saturdays was for worship practice.

So I, [00:20:00] there was not time.

Candice Schutter: All consuming.

Trina Studebaker: for anything else. And we really thought we were serving God and that God was pleased with us, you know. But I still hated myself and I still fought with that, that self-loathing. I mean, it didn't just go away.

And it definitely didn't go away in the cult when it's, it's so contradictory the scriptures that they use to snag you, you know. "You're a new creature in Christ," but then you're a sinner and you know you're going to hell. And scripture was so abused that honestly, as I'm sitting here, I'm like, wow, I have come a little further in my healing because I didn't even feel myself get triggered by saying that scripture to you. This is 20 years [00:21:00] later, after leaving.

We were in the cult for about 14 years. And we brought children into this, you know. We had kids and we were such good Christians. Our firstborn, his name is Christian.

Candice Schutter: Uhhuh.

Trina Studebaker: And you know, we thought that would make us pleasing to God because we were a testimony to the world.

Candice Schutter: I wanna take a minute just to pause and really highlight something that is really important that you're speaking to so eloquently, which is that split self that develops. And that often, and not always, that split self that developed in childhood is the one we carry into the cult. And this idea that there's aspects of us that are shame bound, and we have to sequester off and keep hidden, and even from ourselves. Like we don't even realize that the self that [00:22:00] we're advocating for and the self that we're working so hard to step into and, you know, to be a good Christian or a good wellness practitioner or whatever the thing is, that it's, it's really this false sense of self that has developed as a result of that split.

And that these environments, you know, and I wanna talk more in a minute about what made it culty for people who maybe think, well, I know of a Christian community. Like, I want you to tell us in a minute, a little bit more about what specifically made it culty and extreme. And I think one of the things worth really underscoring is that one of the things that makes an experience culty is that we go into an environment where the false self is encouraged and celebrated.

And this idealistic notion of who we could be is put ahead of who we really are, the authentic impulses that we have, our instincts, and that that divide that already exists in us is [00:23:00] amplified and encouraged.

Trina Studebaker: God. So true. That so resonates.

Candice Schutter: And what I hear you saying.

Trina Studebaker: Yeah. So, so resonates. Yeah.

Some of the culty aspects that I came to, you know, figure out after were, well, so my ex-husband and I ended up in leadership, and that was a sign of our spirituality. We were so pleasing to God. Oh my God. But, we weren't allowed to ask questions.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Trina Studebaker: Like questioning the pastor and his wife.

And actually they were both pastors. They were both considered pastors. We were not allowed to question the pastors. And it wasn't like a written rule. It was just something [00:24:00] implied.

It's hard to describe how that happens. All I knew was it wasn't safe to do that.

And of course we were required to tithe. We were required to let them know how much money we made. And it didn't matter if we were gonna go hungry, we had to give that 10%. And because being on the worship team wasn't enough.

Candice Schutter: Right. The free labor.

Trina Studebaker: Yeah, we had to give financially too.

Our speech, what we said was also monitored. I've shared these examples with you before, but I'll share 'em again because like when I say these to people, they laugh because they're like, are you kidding me? And it's like, no, I'm really not.

We weren't allowed to say anything like, "oh, we're so lucky that this and this happened." Our pastor said that the [00:25:00] word lucky was related to the word Lucifer. Therefore we

could not say it cuz that would be giving glory to the devil. And, the devil was definitely the enemy, and the devil was behind every rock. So there was that.

And then, you know, sometimes as you're saying goodbye to someone and you wish them well, and you say, "take care!" We weren't allowed to say that because there's a scripture that says, we are not to take on the cares of the world. And by telling someone to take care, you're telling them that they should take on the cares of the world.

And it's like, okay, wait a minute, the intention behind that is I'm wishing you well, but our words were taken so literally and so seriously. And man, you, if you didn't speak correctly, like let's say we were at a Bible study, [00:26:00] and if you didn't speak correctly, you were called on it immediately. And you had to reframe and rephrase things so that it would be more pleasing to God.

And I mean, our words do have power. I mean, I believe that to a degree. But I, you know, the fact that we weren't allowed to say, I feel so lucky today is ludicrous.

Candice Schutter: What's so interesting to me about it is how much overlap there is in terms of, so often we think of like fundamentalism in the sort of these binary terms in our culture, there's like the right and there's the left, and it's like the far right extremist monitoring of language and the far lefts extremist monitoring of language are identical. It's just different language and different rationales and a different sacred pseudoscience that's attached to it.

[00:27:00] And as you're saying all these things, I just couldn't help but think of all the new age circles I ran in and the law of attraction and being literally in a workshop where I've told the story on the podcast, so I won't tell it again, but where I was actually prompted to reframe and reword myself, which I had done for years and I refused to do at that particular retreat for the first time ever.

And what a radical act it was. I still will never forget how silent the room got, because I laid claim to the fact that I wanted to express that I was feeling self-doubt. And I was told to reframe it as something positive, right? What do you want? Talk about what you want, not what you don't want, and, and it's so, I love that you said literalizing, because I think that's another thing I want, again, I'm sort of highlighting things in terms of like what's culty? Like, where does that show up?

And I think when it comes to language, aside from the control over it and telling people how to talk, which is weird enough,

Trina Studebaker: [00:28:00] Yeah.

Candice Schutter: This piece around that what I say that it has some sort of like force field around it and that it's gonna change reality as we know it.

I mean, it's so, it's so presumptuous, but it's also kind of a really like emotionally immature perspective around what our emotions are meant to do and what the power that our words do have. Cause I'm with you. Like I'm all about being mindful and conscious with the words that

I use, but I've done it to a fault and that fault is always connected to some magical thinking that I've been taught exists.

And it sounds like it was operating there. Like especially, you're even talking about like the root of the word lucky is the same as the root of the word Lucifer. So therefore, I mean, talk about literal.

Trina Studebaker: Yeah. Right. Yeah. I mean our speech was so controlled.

Another piece of that was it was a really a foundation of a belief system where we weren't allowed, like, [00:29:00] let's say we were sick, we could not say that we were sick, because that would give glory to the devil cuz the devil brought on the sickness.

Candice Schutter: Oh.

Trina Studebaker: And, um, so we had to, in those instances, we could only speak scriptures that talked about how Jesus healed us. And so we couldn't ever be real with anybody. It was all this facade of, oh, life is just, you know, rainbows and unicorns. And when inside you're dying, you're dying to express what you're going through. Um, I,

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Trina Studebaker: the 13, 14 years we were in there was the loneliest time of my life.

I don't like telling other people's stories, but this is kind of important [00:30:00] as far as how it relates to me, because of the sexual trauma that I brought into our marriage.

And so with that thinking as my ex-husband became a teenager and wanted to masturbate, which is absolutely natural. It was a sin. When he would want to masturbate, he would self harm to keep himself from sinning. Because if he died after that, he'd go to hell. And so in his mind, getting married was the answer.

Because of his trauma in this belief system, he carried such an unhealthy view of sex into our marriage. It became an obsession for him. And so when we got married, he felt like, oh, that was his out. He wouldn't have to live in sin. Because in our belief system, at that point, my body belonged to [00:31:00] him, and I was not allowed to say no. And so you bring in my background, my history with his history because of the cultish thinking around sex.

Um, oh my God, literally the first week we were married was when I realized, oh my God. I wasn't self-aware back then. I didn't really understand what was happening, but I knew he had an unhealthy obsession around sex. And I remember thinking, oh, I can probably do this for 20, 25 years. I made it to 28. And you know, cuz divorce is a sin too, right? And, heaven forbid we do anything that's not pleasing to God according to this belief system.

So [00:32:00] sex became a huge, huge divide in our marriage. Again, you know, I wasn't allowed to say no. And when we had our son, our firstborn, my ex-husband resented him

because it took away time and energy that I would normally have for him and for sex. Cuz sex was the most important thing in his world.

And so our oldest Christian. He has these, all these behavior issues.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Trina Studebaker: Guess what? We were taught that you needed to beat the living shit out of your kid. Cuz the Bible has scriptures, you know, "spare the rod, spoil the child," and however that scripture goes. And so my ex-husband was brought up in that. He also had the living shit beat out of him. And I, [00:33:00] I actually, I have so much compassion for him. He didn't have a choice.

And my ex-husband, he was the one that would do it. He would beat him. And I wanted to be pleasing to God, so I had to be the submissive wife. It didn't sit well with me, because this wasn't like a little paddle on the butt, you know, this was like a beating, leaving marks on a two year old child.

Candice Schutter: Oh honey, I'm so sorry.

Trina Studebaker: That's, that's the hardest part of all of this for me.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

And

Trina Studebaker: there was a point in time when, um, my parents were going to take our kids away from us. And I learned this later cuz they saw what was happening. And I also, at that time, I wanted to leave my husband. [00:34:00] I wanted to leave him because I knew it wasn't right, you know. But then there was that battle going on inside of me about wanting to be pleasing to God and I didn't have any options on where to go.

I couldn't have a job. There wasn't a daycare around that would take a child with such behavior problems. He was extremely violent. I mean, no kidding, right?

Candice Schutter: Understandably.

Trina Studebaker: Yeah, of course. And. This is still, it's very charged for me.

I couldn't leave my husband and like, let's say go live with my parents. That was one thing that I did think of, but they weren't, they weren't serving God like we were.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Trina Studebaker: And serving God was still number one. [00:35:00] Not protecting my child.

Candice Schutter: Yes. That's the power of indoctrination and I think so many people, again, I wanna pause to just really highlight this. And I really appreciate and wanna celebrate that you said that you can share this with us so bravely. I mean, this is so courageous what you're doing and that you have done your work and understand that you don't need to carry shame around this.

I mean, a healthy amount of shame in order to self-reflect, but not the toxic shame keeps us silent and keeps us from sharing these things because it's so, it's such a tragic example of when indoctrination comes in young. I mean, how old you were 19 when you got married, right?

Trina Studebaker: I was 21 when we got into the cult.

Candice Schutter: Okay. And what we know now is that the brain isn't even fully developed until we're 25, 26. So, you're still forming yourself as a [00:36:00] person. You have this trauma and you were involved in a cult of one at eight years old, so you already, in my opinion, are susceptible to this.

And then you, you come in and you feel so flawed because of what someone did to you that separated you from yourself. You're told finally there is a path to grace, to righteousness, what you know intuitively is possible, which is peace and joy and love like that. And you're told, here's the map. And then you're following the map and then this shit starts going sideways, and the only map you have is the map you've been given.

Trina Studebaker: Right. Yeah.

Candice Schutter: So turning to people who don't have the map, when you believe that this is the best way and might I add, I'm sure you're experiencing some benefit from being a part of the community, whether it's having a community, whether it's just certain moments of grace.

I mean, do you wanna talk a little bit about what kept you there in terms of the parts that were [00:37:00] actually, maybe not fulfilling you, but, giving you something that you were looking for? Like, where were you being met?

Trina Studebaker: Definitely. Well, honestly, being part of the worship team was the highlight. Being able to use my gift. Um,

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Trina Studebaker: I don't play much anymore. I don't have a piano. But at one time I was a gifted pianist, and I loved being able to express myself on the piano. And the best part of the cult was the music.

Candice Schutter: Ah,

Trina Studebaker: And so I, I would really look forward to our worship practice.

And I had been trained classically, so I hadn't been trained to play by ear, to play by chords, and I developed that skill through the worship team. And people, they [00:38:00] believed in me. They believed in my gift. And that was honestly, that was so fulfilling.

I still miss playing with a band. I still miss it. Even though, yeah, it's, it's kind of crazy. Even though, geez, I was in a cult, but that the music was the best part of it.

Candice Schutter: There's always something beautiful there, always. There's always something beautiful there that gets us in the door and that keeps us there. And it's never, in my experience, at least, I haven't seen an example where it's just one thing or the other. It's always both and. This, this deep feeling of being met and seen and, and so isn't it ironic that we can be in a space and feel both seen and invisible at the same time.

Trina Studebaker: Right. Like it doesn't make sense, but it is fact. That is so [00:39:00] true. You're so good at, at explaining these things, like I just know my experience, right. But you ha have such a great way of really explaining it where other people could understand it.

Candice Schutter: It's like your fingers on the piano keys. Like, for me, I find words to be incredibly limiting and frustrating times. And also, they're the keys for me. And it's part of why self-expression is so important to me, is that the ability to have a human experience and then be able to articulate it is like playing a song. For me, it's like music, like a tone that I recognize.

I'm like, oh, that's the tone. And, the only reason I'm able to find words around this specifically is that I've been in it. I know what you're talking about. I know that feeling of just feeling more seen than you've ever been, and more invisible than you've ever been at the same [00:40:00] time.

Trina Studebaker: At the same time. I mean, the skills that I gained with the piano during that time were phenomenal. I mean, truly phenomenal. And I took that, or I've taken that into the rest of my life, right? I don't play classically anymore. When I do play, I sit down and I just make shit up and.

Candice Schutter: It's beautiful.

Trina Studebaker: it's, that's so beautiful and I can really express myself that way. So that was like the best part.

Candice Schutter: And it sort of makes sense that that outlet became so rich and so fulfilling because the other outlets weren't available to you. You couldn't tell your husband that you weren't in the mood. You couldn't tell your husband, you're hitting the child too hard, or maybe you shouldn't hit the child at all. You, I mean, and all these things. When I say you couldn't, I really encourage people to circle back to. earlier episodes in the series where I talk about Janja Lalich's bounded choice framework and all that. Like [00:41:00] it's not a plain and simple choice anymore. There's real barriers to being able to express in so many ways.

So you found this avenue through which you could express and you went all in because

Trina Studebaker: Oh, yeah,

Candice Schutter: it was a place where you could truly express and yourself. It makes so much sense, and we can celebrate that. Like we can celebrate you were able to have that experience the of all this.

Trina Studebaker: I'm so grateful for that. Like, that was a gift to me. That was a gift to me that I've taken into the rest of my life, and I am forever grateful for that.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Trina Studebaker: The hardest part, you know, I say I don't carry any shame around my story, but I will say the one part that challenges me around that still, and I'm still working on [00:42:00] this, and I've gained a lot of ground on it, is how I allowed my children to be abused because of this belief system.

And I'm sure people could say, and I know people do say, how could a mother who loves their children allow this to happen? I did not have a choice in that situation with that foundation of the belief system. That belief system was like a hundred percent fact to me. And there wasn't an option. I mean, it's crazy to think that I couldn't go live with my parents because they weren't serving God like we were.

Candice Schutter: Right.

Trina Studebaker: That's nuts. My parents are to this day, they're, they're the good Christians. You know, they do good. They love people. And, they didn't get involved in the [00:43:00] extremism like I did.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Trina Studebaker: But the part that I do struggle with is that piece of allowing my kids to be abused by their dad. Some time had passed and I had finally put my foot down. But you know what, by that time it was too late. My kids had already been so fucked up. And like my youngest Austin, he wasn't beaten like Christian was. He was a very easy child in that respect. He didn't have behavior problems. He was well behaved and just a little love bug. And so he didn't experience that. But he did experience our home being filled with anger, violence, and the threat of violence always. Because as his brother got older, he would [00:44:00] then take it out on Austin. So my ex-husband would beat Christian, and then Christian would beat Austen. And so, I was so hypervigilant.

Oh, another piece I would add is like, when I was thinking about leaving, I was trying to figure out a way, and I knew that if the state got involved, they would take my kids from me. And

Candice Schutter: You knew that?

Trina Studebaker: Well, in my mind, I knew that. I assumed that.

Cuz we were told in the church that the outside world would think what we were doing was wrong and would be abuse. But it wasn't, they, you know. They reiterated it, we're doing what the Bible says to do and that's what's pleasing to God.

But in my mind, I, I just knew that the state would take my kids away.

And then where I took that in my mind was then they would end up in foster care and then in my mind [00:45:00] they would end up being sexually abused like so many in foster care are. That was because of my trauma around that, I was not going to let that happen no matter what. Cult or not, I was not going to let sexual trauma happen to my kids.

Candice Schutter: So you told yourself that you were protecting them from that. Right. Yeah.

Trina Studebaker: Yeah. And so, if we fast forward just this last summer, my oldest son, we were having a conversation. And I have such a good relationship with my kids and there's a part of me that understands why, because of all the work that all of us have done around this. But then there's that other part that's like, oh my God, I can't believe they don't hate me, don't resent me. Well, there has been some [00:46:00] resentment, um,

Candice Schutter: Sure.

Trina Studebaker: Yeah, and I understand it, but there's a part of me that goes, I can't believe they even want anything to do with me. But I have such a good relationship with both of them. And this summer, Christian and I were talking and he wanted to talk about some things around the childhood. And cuz he wanted to understand something. He said, "mom, there's this one situation where dad had taken me. He had picked me up to beat me and he had picked him up by the throat, to carry him back into the bedroom where he would do the beatings.

And Christian looked back at me and he's like, maybe four or five, and Austin's about two. And he looked back at me like, "mom, aren't you gonna protect me?" And what he saw was me protecting Austin. You know, I had Austin huddled in [00:47:00] my arms and not letting him see what was happening.

But to Christian, that looked like I wasn't protecting him.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Trina Studebaker: And when he told me that story. I mean, I sobbed. I didn't sleep that night. I just, I had that going through my head over and over that I let that happen, you know? And that's only one incident.

And what he didn't know until just the last two or three months, what he didn't know is that I would have sex with his dad more often. I would give my body to him so that he would be kinder to the kids. So I gave, I gave my most prized possession, myself, in a way that I didn't want to do, which was sex. So he'd be in a better mood and wouldn't be so [00:48:00] hard on the kids.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Yeah,

Trina Studebaker: That's really hard.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Trina Studebaker: Um, Christian did appreciate knowing that. He's like, wow, I guess you never really know what somebody's doing on your behalf when they're not looking.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Trina Studebaker: As a four or five year old child, all he knows is his dad is gonna beat him, you know?

Candice Schutter: yeah.

Trina Studebaker: Um, that's the hardest part about all of this,

Candice Schutter: I bet, I bet.

Trina Studebaker: because now my

Candice Schutter: it, go ahead.

Trina Studebaker: on their own journey of healing this trauma.

Candice Schutter: Yeah, yeah. Well, and I mean, I just wanna say, as an aside, kudos to you for being willing to take that journey with them. Cause a lot of us know what it's like to heal from childhood trauma and not have, and our parents not having the [00:49:00] ability to take that journey with us and to, to have a conversation like that where he can voice that kind of truth to you and you can, you know, receive the impact of that and grieve together.

And also that he can express his resentment and anger and that you can, you understand and you can make room for that. So I just, I just really wanna celebrate that you're doing that. The, the impact of that can't be, it can't be overstated. It's just such an important part of the healing process for all of you to be able to do it together.

And it makes me wonder if, I want you to tell us about your exit from the cult and, and how having come through and out of something like that has the ability to bind people closer together than before. And I am not saying that it happens for a reason at all. I'm saying

Trina Studebaker: feel the same way about that as you do

Candice Schutter: Right. . Um, I, I think [00:50:00] that there's something about surviving something and being willing to be vulnerable around it, that creates a deep sense of intimacy, and it doesn't justify what came before, but it does create an opportunity for a different kind of love and deep connection.

And, so tell us a little bit about your leaving was like. Was it the abuse escalating? It got to a point? Like what was, because I know you had said to me that you decided to leave years before you were actually able to leave, so tell us about that.

Trina Studebaker: Yeah. Um, I wanted to leave about five years before we actually did. I was definitely not happy. And a lot of it had to do with our kids. I didn't want them in that belief system anymore. Like I was over it.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Trina Studebaker: I was so over it. And I mean, I knew at that point it wasn't a healthy belief system.

So my ex-husband, he had [00:51:00] started listening to a radio show. And it was kind of combining the belief system that we had with some more newer type of thinking. And that was resonating for him.

And it was from a church in Colorado and they were coming to Portland for this big like seminar type thing. And so we went and we really felt called by God we felt called to join this new church that they were just starting in Portland, but we knew shit was gonna hit the fan when we told the pastors and the leadership, cuz we were still part of leadership.

So we were again, I mean we're still trying to be pleasing to God and so in our minds we were like, well if we go to our pastors in a [00:52:00] loving way and in a way that's telling them that God is telling us we need to move on, we thought maybe there would be a sliver of a chance that we would leave on good terms.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Trina Studebaker: Which was naive. And so, when it came time my ex-husband went to the male pastor, I went to the female pastor. And I will never forget when I told her, what she said to me was, "Well, who's gonna do everything that you do?"

That's all that mattered to her. And the reason that hurt so much was, wow, in all this time, 14 years, you never saw my heart. And I've always been a compassionate person, and it's like,

wow, you never saw my heart. You mean [00:53:00] all you cared about was what I could contribute to this cult? That's all she cared about.

It didn't matter because we did leave. And we lost every friend we had. Nobody was allowed to talk to us. And, and we knew what was gonna happen because we had seen people leave before, and it wasn't good. You know, you weren't allowed to contact them or be friends with them in any way. And even if you were at the grocery store, you needed to avoid them because they were clearly deceived by Satan.

Candice Schutter: It's so interesting that you, you said we felt called by God. This felt like what God wanted us to do. And this sort of, again, this is a very culty idea that like the wisdom, the pseudoscience pours through certain people, and that there's maybe some lip service around how we can connect to it directly and access it. But when we do [00:54:00] that and connect to it directly and the thing that we discover for ourselves is in some way different than or contradicts the leadership, then suddenly we're ostracized or made wrong. And it, and it's just such an interesting thing because it's, it's really, again, one of the, the hallmarks of a cult is who decides what's true and what isn't.

Trina Studebaker: Oh yeah. I mean cuz they were like, well, we feel like God is telling you to stay, you know.

Candice Schutter: Right, exactly.

Trina Studebaker: But really they just didn't want to lose two people that were all in and giving every, giving their lives, four or five days a week to this. who would do everything we did.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Trina Studebaker: And we had family. We had family that were still there. My sister-in-law and her husband and their four girls. They were [00:55:00] still there. And they barely talked to us, mostly to try to convince us to come back.

Candice Schutter: Uhhuh.

Trina Studebaker: And my ex-husband, his parents went there also. And so we just, we didn't go to family gatherings after that for quite some time. And then interestingly enough, after we left, there was a mass exodus that began to happen. Because it was almost like, well, if they can leave, maybe we can leave too. And I was so fucking happy that other people were leaving. But the damage was already done as far as with family. In their eyes, we were worshipping Satan now.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Trina Studebaker: can you, I mean,

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Binary. Very binary.

Trina Studebaker: I had [00:56:00] given my husband at that time an ultimatum about the violence that was in our home. And I told him he had to get therapy or I was leaving. And the boys were older at this point, and we must have been out of the cult at that point because I felt comfortable saying I would leave him.

I began to have serious mental health problems. I mean, I already had them, but they began to be harder for me to hide.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Trina Studebaker: I was at my end. I was tired of being hypervigilant. My nervous system was shot. I began to have health problems.

And when I attempted suicide, I had been out of the cult for quite a while. And after that happened was when I had this realization of, [00:57:00] oh, now it's time to deal with that sexual trauma that happened when I was eight that I had not told anybody about. And I must have been 40 at this point. Something like, yeah, I was about 40. So decades I held in that trauma, and I started to get some help after that, like real help.

And in one of my sessions I had this aha of being separated from my body and realizing for my healing to really begin, I needed to become friends with my body. And I needed to forgive my body cuz I had developed this hatred of myself. And what I realized, I had this hatred of my body didn't protect me when I needed it to protect me [00:58:00] the most. And so I began developing that partnership with my body, becoming friends with my body. And, it was such a raw but beautiful time for me.

Um, after the suicide attempt, I felt like for the first year or two after that, I was fighting for my life. And so I was making decisions and I was choosing life finally. And it meant digging, digging in with lots of the trauma.

In one of my sessions with a therapist, my ex-husband and I, we had gone into marriage counseling. And our marriage was in trouble and we knew it. And we were in therapy off and on for like five years, went through two separations. But I will never forget [00:59:00] when we were in one session and I learned, and this is crazy to think that I didn't know this, but I learned that I am an autonomous being. And I get to say who touches me and who doesn't. And how they react is their problem. And I mean, that was huge for me. That I could actually say no to my husband. Like with sex, all of a sudden I had permission to say no. And it was a revelation.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Trina Studebaker: Being autonomous has been lifesaving. And then it allows other people to be autonomous in my life. And so, like, I feel so strongly about honoring someone's yes and someone's no, because of my experience.

[01:00:00] Oh, and, and we had ended up starting martial arts, which that was a really positive experience to a point. And then with even that, our grand master ended up being a pedophile.

So he was married, and I was really good friends with his wife. And, what we didn't know was that he had groomed her from the time she was 12 or 13. He frequently cheated on her and she got to the point where, you know, she was over it. And also what then came to light. He had been grooming somebody new.

We were close friends, and I also felt like I needed to protect his daughter. He had, at the time, his daughter was eight. [01:01:00] I knew I could not keep quiet. And I had to testify against him. I was on the stand for three hours, testifying against someone who was one of my closest friends.

Candice Schutter: How long into that friendship until you discovered the truth about him.

Trina Studebaker: Oh, it was years.

Candice Schutter: Wow.

Trina Studebaker: Yeah. He ended up being in prison for five or six years.

But part of the time, when things were coming to light, it was like, well, he's our grand master. He couldn't possibly.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Trina Studebaker: do something like this. He was so revered. He was so respected in the entire martial arts community in the Portland area and actually and beyond. We had one of the best martial arts studios around, and that was a tight-knit community. And like if you became a black [01:02:00] belt, which all of us did, it's almost like then you're in that inner circle.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. Yep. I know all about that.

Trina Studebaker: And it's like, I am done being in anybody's inner circle.

Candice Schutter: Was that the turning point for you in terms of that?

Trina Studebaker: Yeah, for sure. Because then, you know, being part of the dance community now, currently. When I first joined the ecstatic dance community, it's part of my self-care. It feeds my soul in a way that nothing has fed it in so long. And so I, I just love it so much and the people have really embraced me.

It's, honestly, I would say it's the first group of people that have really embraced me for who I am in all my weirdness and all my scars and everything that I [01:03:00] bring with it. Um,

but I remember at the beginning somebody had said to me, "oh, you've become friends with one of the DJs. You've really arrived now."

And I'm like, fuck that. Because at this point I do not put anybody on a pedestal. Nobody gets to be there.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Trina Studebaker: There is no pedestal.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Trina Studebaker: I've learned that lesson.

Candice Schutter: The hard way, as most of us do. Yeah.

Trina Studebaker: The hard and brutal way.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm. .

Trina Studebaker: Yeah.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Trina Studebaker: So brutal.

Candice Schutter: And being able to really recognize, I should say for the listeners how we know each other. How Trina and I know each other is through the ecstatic dance community in Portland. And it was a community that I was never really super involved in, but my partner, Chris, my partner of 10 years, was a DJ in the community for many, many years.

And so I would go here and there to gatherings and whatnot. [01:04:00] And, you know, I think the other thing that I would say, and I don't know if this resonates with you, I'll let you tell me if, if it lands. But like for me, going into any large community, the ecstatic dance community in Portland, any community.

Even just last night I went to a movement class at a community rec center here. Like when I walk into a room in a community, I have still like this sort of lingering, I wanna call it hypervigilance, maybe it's not hyper, but it's like it's vigilance. It's vigilance. And I'm sort of reading the dynamic, and there's a self-protection that I have that at a certain point kind of worked against me. I wasn't getting close to any communities, and I wasn't experiencing belonging and I was always on the margins cause I was so afraid of these dynamics. And now that I understand them as part of the beauty of having conversations like this and doing the series is saying like, when it's a feeling and you [01:05:00] can't put your finger on why the feeling is there. It's an uncomfortable thing to like wade into a community cuz you're like, is the feeling gonna be there or not? But when you actually know what you're looking at and

can understand. Even in that community, the ecstatic dance community in Portland, like if I look over here, I could see some culty dynamic going on in a group of people. If I look over here, it's not present. Where am I gonna engage and spend my energy and invest?

And so it's really critical for me to see, it's not always, the cultiness is defined by the group at large. It's an interpersonal dynamic that can emerge within a group in a small way. Or it does spread like a virus though I feel like if it's not understood and seen and then it can spread to the whole group and it doesn't, it can both be there and not be there.

And this is why some people can have a very different experience in a community than other people, right. If it's not a full-blown cult.

And I think you named so beautifully, the reason I mentioned all [01:06:00] that is you named really beautifully one of the dynamics, which is there's a person who's holding space and is a facilitator. What is my relationship to that person? How do I see that person? Just because they have the social proof of being the dj, the the person at the helm. What does that mean to me? Is there a hierarchy that I'm operating under unconsciously? And can I become conscious of it and be like, Nope, not doing that.

Trina Studebaker: Right.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. So good for you.

Trina Studebaker: Yeah, I, I do still find myself vigilant, as you say, if I'm entering a new group. An example would be, um, I think there were maybe seven or eight of us in this reiki circle, and there was a massage table and everybody got to take turns, you know, being on the table and having people bless them with good energy or whatever it was. And I remember specifically, I was having issues with my elbow. [01:07:00] And I get on the table and they ask me, you know, is there anything that you want us to focus on?

And I was like, yeah, my elbow is killing me. Boom, right there. Somebody says, would you like to reframe that? I don't think your elbow is actually killing you.

I got up, I was in a rage. I got up and I was like, fuck all of you. And I left.

Candice Schutter: Mm.

Trina Studebaker: And a girlfriend of mine, She knew all of my history and she was also in the martial arts with me. She knew the history of the cult and our words being so monitored, so she like explained to the group.

But I mean, to this day in, in some of these circles, people are hyper-vigilant about every word they say. So like when we got out [01:08:00] of the cult, Candice, I let the words fly. I swear like a sailor and it makes me so happy because I can say whatever the fuck I want and nobody is monitoring me or telling me to reframe it.

And if they do, they will get a word from me cuz I don't back down anymore. I'm not that little girl that, oh, backs down to somebody correcting me. Uhuh

Not anymore.

Candice Schutter: Well, and that plays out. I love that. And that plays out two ways. It's like there's the part that flinches right, the old young part that's like, oh, I'm not gonna say anything. I don't wanna rock the boat. That compliant good girl persona, that hello patriarchy, we all have.

And then there's also the persona that gets developed, I call it the spiritual persona, but it can be fill in the blank for spiritual, the persona that gets developed that [01:09:00] another sort of twist on the good girl archetype is this 'evolved' archetype like, well, I don't get reactive. You know, like to have a strong emotion is evidence of my spiritual immaturity, which is a hundred percent not true.

Just like the micromanaging of language. It's such an oversimplification of what's actually going on there, right? And so this spiritual persona is like, well, maybe I have the courage now to speak up, but I'm invested in the identity of the person who doesn't raise her voice.

Trina Studebaker: Right.

Candice Schutter: Or the persona who is able to transmute reactivity into, fill in the blank. Right? I can put words around all this cuz I was the queen and still am, I catch myself all the time. That's why I love talking to people who are like, I don't give a fuck because I'm like, I want to be in that space and surrounded by folks who are both mindful and [01:10:00] also irreverent, who are both doing their inner work and also not emotionally constipated.

So just to say, I'm right there with you. And I love that you have been able to not only step beyond the trauma that you experienced in your youth in terms of your expression, and be brave enough to say no, which is massive. You've also stepped beyond the spiritual persona that you created to protect that little girl who couldn't say no. And you're able to express yourself authentically outside of that, too. And I just think that's so inspiring.

Trina Studebaker: Oh, thank you. You know, what I know is that for my mental health, I have to be authentic. I can't be that fake person anymore or, you know, have that persona or a desire to have people perceive me in a certain way. I really don't give a [01:11:00] rat's ass how people perceive me. I know for my own mental health who I need to be and how I need to be it. And part of that for me is being authentic. Being honest about my feelings, and if I'm hurt or sad or angry. And I don't want to reframe those fucking emotions.

Candice Schutter: Right, It's no different than the God and the devil. It's just a different way of saying like, oh, if I have a negative emotion, that's why the phrase negative emotion, really gets my goat at this point.

Trina Studebaker: Me too.

Candice Schutter: I haven't figured out another way to describe that spectrum, and it just makes me nuts because it's very similar to like the good versus evil, God versus the devil, this is good and this is bad. It just feels like another way that we hide from ourselves in each other and therefore do harm.

Trina Studebaker: Right. Yeah. [01:12:00] Um, I have found that once I really embraced who I am, I have so many people come to me to share something dark with me because they know I'm not gonna judge them. That I will have compassion for them and allow them to be where they're at and not try to fix them or change them, but just witness. And I have found, I, I have a wealth, oh my God, I have a wealth of friends. And I think part of it is because I have gotten myself to a place where I can really be authentic and that resonates for people.

Candice Schutter: A hundred percent. It does.

Trina Studebaker: They wanna be authentic too.

Candice Schutter: We want it more than anything, I think really deep down. And it's just a really scary, there's [01:13:00] so many layers to that, like to authenticity, right? And it's about continually uncovering those layers and when we feel threatened by it, it's really something for us to pay attention to.

So I really appreciate that you, it's really stepping out of the codependent paradigm of understanding that our expression isn't about making other people feel this way or that way. It's just about expression, and that it's their responsibility to navigate those feelings. It's not to say that we're not cognizant of how our expression impacts others.

That's happening too. Again, it's a both and, right? It's not either or. It's both and. Like that's happening too. And really though, when we are expressing from a place of taking care of the feelings of the people around us, we're not doing them a service either.

Trina Studebaker: Right, right.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. And you really get that.

There's a part of me that goes, wow, I didn't know I, that I had autonomy. I didn't know that till maybe six years ago.[01:14:00]

Candice Schutter: Uhhuh. Yeah.

Trina Studebaker: Wow. But that's been like a foundation in my healing. But there's, you know, there's so much, Right. This healing journey.

Candice Schutter: There always is. There's more.

Trina Studebaker: There's not enough paper for me to make a list of the different healers or therapists and rituals and whatever that I have done to get to where I'm at. It's crazy.

Candice Schutter: So with that in mind, given that folks who listen to the podcast, you know, some people have walked through many fires and we're giving language together to experiences that we all share.

One of the things on the flip side of it is always like, what does recovery look like and how, how do we heal? And, and there's so many, so many answers to that question. And like you just said, and we could spend a whole series of podcasts answering that question.

A question I guess I [01:15:00] wanna ask you is, what would you say now, having gone through what you've gone through and survived what you've survived, to somebody who might be listening and is feeling a sense of stuckness. Whether it's in a marriage or a group situation, a so-called cult.

I know there's not one thing that can be said to a person in those moments, , because it's bounded choice and it's, it's a complex system that they're in.

But what do you see now that you wish you had known and seen then?

Trina Studebaker: Oh. You know what comes to mind is listening to my body. Now when I was separate from my body for decades, you know, that wasn't an option. But now that I have come into my body, and I listen to my body. It's like, really listening to it. Maybe there's somebody that makes you nervous for [01:16:00] some reason, gives you a weird feeling, you know, and you have that weird feeling in your gut.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Trina Studebaker: Trust that feeling. Because what I have learned is our bodies carry so much wisdom, and that's been a really big piece for me is listening to that.

And then, you know, there's also, when you're talking with someone, engaging with someone and you leave feeling lighter or maybe like you really connected heart to heart with someone. Listen to that. That's your body's wisdom telling you that, you know, that was a really good thing. That was intimate. That was healing. That was helpful. Or it was loving and compassionate.

Uh, you know, sharing my story, that makes me feel so alive. That is what makes me feel like I'm [01:17:00] thriving. There's just something about it. It gives me life, so I feel that in my body. I notice it. I'm aware of it. And it's like, oh, I wanna do more of that.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Trina Studebaker: It's just, you know, it's that body's wisdom.

And for me, I can't respond in an authentic way if I'm separated from my body. But if I can get back to where I'm in my body and I'm feeling safe in my body, then I can go from there.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Trina Studebaker: Does that make sense?

Candice Schutter: It does, it makes perfect sense. What you're describing is like the dissociation versus the actual being in the body and that there can be heightened emotions in either situation and what it means is gonna vary based on whether we're actually present in our bodies or if we're actually sort of activated and, and kind of responding to another time.

Trina Studebaker: Yeah. [01:18:00] Yeah. You know, I look back and I had literally been disassociated from my body for decades, and it, like, it's just mind boggling to me that I even was able to function. But again, there's that resiliency, and, I honestly, I want a t-shirt that says Resilient AF.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Trina Studebaker: It's like the story of my life and, um,

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Trina Studebaker: But then again, I'm tired of being resilient, you know?

Candice Schutter: Exactly. Well, that's that both and thing, right? It's like, it's important to be able to name and then to not clinging to the experience. It's both, for sure.

Trina Studebaker: I think one reason why I am able to be present in my body is, I mean, it's no surprise that I have been living with chronic pain since 2007 [01:19:00] cuz you know, our bodies carry trauma and hold it in a lot of times, and so I do have chronic pain. But that's been a gift in and of itself because it's allowed me to really be present with myself and with my body and not try to escape it. And become friends with it. The chronic pain, it actually has been a beautiful gift for me to get to know my body so well, and to listen to it.

Candice Schutter: Yeah, yeah. Well, I'm so grateful that you agreed to do this. I love what you just said. It feels like a really sweet landing space, because of that ability to listen.

Listening to the body and it, and it is a reflection of that deeper self that was abandoned so long ago because it, it had to be for the sake of survival. And that you've [01:20:00] retrieved it, and this relationship that you now have with your body and your being and your emotion and your story. And it just really, it illustrates how much the process of separating from cult dynamics is both an internal and external process, like how it is the inner work and the external relating, and how they're both so important and your story's just such a beautiful example of it. And your courage and willingness to share it so openly. It's just such a testament to how far you've come. It's amazing.

Trina Studebaker: Thank you. You know, I do, I really appreciate that acknowledgement. It, it means the world to me, you know, to be seen, to be heard, to be witnessed. And you

know, in the back of my mind I'm like, there will be people that judge me after listening to this, you know? And, and that's okay. I would judge me too.

And, you know, and I did for a long time. And I don't care anymore. I, [01:21:00] I really wanna help people, whatever that means.

Candice Schutter: Yes.

Trina Studebaker: And it's hard to put some of that truth out there.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Trina Studebaker: It's hard.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Trina Studebaker: But it's worth it.

Candice Schutter: It's hard and it's heavy work and it's worth it. Exactly.

Trina Studebaker: It is worth it. I know just by sharing my story with you today, that my healing has gone deeper.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm. Yeah, mine too. To sit and bear witness to someone's whole story is a transformation in and of itself.

Trina Studebaker: Yeah. Thank you.

Candice Schutter: That, you've given that to all of us. Yeah. Thank you.

Trina Studebaker: Thank you. And thank you for what you're doing. This series that you're doing is so important and like I just couldn't stay quiet.

Candice Schutter: Yay. I don't want you to stay quiet. Not one bit.

Trina Studebaker: I'm not that little Miss Goody two shoes [01:22:00] anymore. Not at all. I don't recognize that other person. It was a different life.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. Yeah. It was a different life. We can have many lives in this one for sure.

I'm grateful to be doing these many lives alongside people like you. Makes the journey that much more authenticating.

Trina Studebaker: Yeah. Thank you. I'm really grateful. And I, I hope this does touch somebody, you know? I hope it helps in some way.

Candice Schutter: I know it will.

Wow. I just have so much love for this beautiful human. Not only for her courage and her resilience, but for her remarkable journey towards self-acceptance.

Nothing about what Trina just did was easy, and that's what makes it so [01:23:00] damn important.

For those of us who struggle with our mental health from time to time, which by the way is most of us, I'm here to say I see you. If you or someone near to you is experiencing a mental health crisis, please remember to dial 988 for confidential 24/7 support,

And let's do our own work so that we can make room in our hearts for stories like these. Cultic conditioning thrives in silence, so it is imperative that we normalize our challenges, darker truths, and shadow stories.

May we be inspired by Trina, and all who are brave enough to share their stories. May we become permissionaries for one another.

If you'd like to hear more from Trina, consider subscribing to her YouTube channel, Growing Chronically Hopeful, where she shares about her ongoing journey of healing. Or you're welcome to reach out to her directly via email at [01:24:00] writetotrina@gmail.com. Links are in the show notes.

Okay, friends. Next week is another BFD. I'll be sharing a recent conversation that I had with two humans that, at least in part, inspired the launch of this series.

I'm not gonna tell you the who and what of it yet, because I want it to be a surprise. But for now, let's just say that the next episode is gonna feature two guests who have been a huge inspiration to me. And I'm pretty damn thrilled that I got the opportunity to sit down and have a heart to heart with them.

If you haven't yet, please rate, review and subscribe to the podcast. And be sure to check things out over on Patreon, where your listener donations are making this work possible.

And Patreon is where I drop all the extras. On Monday, I'm releasing another chapter of my ebook... yes, that's finally happening... and if you join us over there, you'll get immediate access to all the many bonus episodes that are now available. Tracy Stamper and I have been [01:25:00] deconstructing dogma post-Org, and it's kind of sort of blowing our minds. The ideas just keep coming, and given that there's so much to share and so little time for me to

edit, Patreon is a place where I can give it all away with ease. Videos, listen links, and other extras. It's all there for you at patreon.com/thedeeperpulse.

All right. That's it for 2022. I'll see you next week with a great launch to the new year.

Be sure to tune in and keep on moving toward what moves you.

Caio.