

Candice Schutter: Hello, and welcome back to The Deeper Pulse and the continuation of the 'cult'ure series.

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Before we dive in, a quick content warning. This episode includes reference to child abuse, neglect, and suicide. It may be triggering to trauma survivors or anyone who has experience in high demand environments or emotionally coercive relationships. Please listen with care.

The stories and opinions shared here are based on personal experience and are not intended to malign any group, individual, or organization.

I never met my paternal grandmother, Barbara. she took her own life a couple of years before I was born, and just three days before her 50th birthday. It wasn't her first suicide attempt. She'd battled with addiction and depression for much of her life.

Perhaps because I am nearing the age she was when she left this world, a few years ago, I did a little digging trying to unearth what was at the root of her pain. I even traveled abroad to the small island of Vis just off the Croatian mainland in the Adriatic Sea, where my great-grandparents, her parents had immigrated from, making the long journey to San Pedro, California about 10 years before my grandmother's birth.

While visiting the homeland, and with the help of a distant relative who was kind enough to join me as translator, I visited the registrar's office and looked on as an exceedingly patient woman, spent the better part of a morning leafing through these large books that looked as though they belonged in a Harry Potter movie. The pages contained death and marriage records going back two centuries. We were hoping to find something, anything really, that could point to my great-grandmother's identity. In the end, we came up empty-handed.

According to family lore, my great-grandmother had died when Barbara was still an infant. And as a result of this tragedy, she'd spent time in a Catholic orphanage before eventually being reunited with my great-grandfather when he remarried a few years later.

I'm told she was treated as an outsider in this new family. Marginalized and misunderstood, Barbara became defiant. She got into trouble and was arrested for a series of petty crimes, and in 1937, she was sent to the Ventura School For Girls, a correctional facility, and so-called reformatory school. My grandmother spent three years, three months, and three days the walls of this compound before finally being released on her 18th birthday.

The Ventura School for Girls was established in 1913 to house young girls who had been formally incarcerated at the Whittier State Reformatory. In 1962, the facility was moved to Camarillo, as part of the California Youth Authority, known as the CYA, and it's since become a co-ed correctional facility.

According to a 2005 article published in the Berkeley Journal of Gender, Law and Justice, the CYA had faced bitter criticism for decades due to ongoing allegations of physical and sexual abuse and multiple reports describing deplorable inhumane conditions in their facilities. The article's author, Freeda Yllana writes. "For decades, the people of California have mistakenly entrusted their youth to an institution that locked their children in cells and failed to respond to their basic developmental needs. The system's effect was only to further traumatize the youth, finally releasing them as adults unequipped to handle adult responsibilities." a lawsuit against CYA was filed in 2004, and it resulted in demand for reforms, but plans to ensure compliance were questionable.

CYA has since become the California Division of Juvenile Justice, and the Ventura School is now the Ventura Youth Correctional Facility. It currently has the capacity to house roughly 600 youth.

Now, while I do have many feelings on the subject, I'm not here for open debate on the many problems inherent in the juvenile justice system. That's a very necessary conversation for another day.

Instead, I wanna pan out a bit more and shine light on the fact that not every "troubled teen" is a danger to themselves or others. And even if and when they are, it could be that they're simply passing through a season of age appropriate adolescent rebellion. Perhaps they're lashing out because they in some way feel unseen or misunderstood. Their rage might be a byproduct of systemic oppression or pain that they are experiencing internally that they don't yet have language for, and as a result, it's coming out sideways as disrespect, anger, or even violent aggression. and I'm sure you've heard it many times before, hurt people, hurt people. And children who are hurting, and make no mistake, these are children. They deserve better than what residential or institutionalized care has to offer.

You see, correctional facilities are not the only place teens are sent when their needs exceed the capacity of their caregivers. There are a large number of facilities nationwide that make up what has come to be known as the troubled teen industry, a web of so-called therapeutic boarding schools, rehab facilities, residential treatment centers, wilderness programs, and conversion camps. Most of these programs are funded by private companies, nonprofits, or faith-based organizations. And they oftentimes operate in remote locations with little to no legislative oversight.

In 2008, the US Government Accountability Office did publish a report that identified, and I " thousands of allegations of abuse, some of which resulted in death at residential programs across the country and in American owned and American operated facilities abroad."

Change is pretty slow in coming, given special interest funds and the privatization of this industry. The troubled teen industry is a multi-billion dollar money machine that preys on parental anxiety and uses deceptive marketing tactics to sell a high dollar dogmatic approach to treatment wherein children are separated from their families and indoctrinated to believe that they are inherently at fault, flawed, and in need of fixing.

Breaking Code Silence is a movement led by survivors. It was created in 2014 to encourage individuals who've experienced abuse in the troubled teen industry to speak out about their

experiences. A staggering number of survivor stories have resulted alleging remarkably similar experiences. Children abducted from their beds in the middle of the night, subjected to extreme social isolation, physical, sexual and emotional abuse, coercive indoctrination, and chronic gaslighting. In some cases, reports were made of deprivation from basic needs like sunlight, food, and water.

In 2021, Paris Hilton released a documentary called, *This Is Paris*, where she spoke publicly about 11 months she spent as a teen at Provo Canyon School and the emotional and sexual trauma she alleges experiencing while there. Her visibility as a social media influencer has shined a critical spotlight on the Breaking Code Silence movement.

Candice Schutter: And as a result, a network of brave survivors are now speaking out. And today you'll be hearing from one of them.

In 1996, just two months after her 16th birthday, Lindsay Spyker awoke in the middle of the night to two strangers hovering over her bed. She was taken from her family home to a reform school facility in La Verkin, Utah, where she would live on lockdown for the next 22 months of her life.

Cross Creek was founded by a former Provo Canyon School faculty member by the name of Robert Lichfield, who, without so much as a degree in child psych, joined with others, including David Gilcrease, to create several of these so-called rehabilitation programs. And it's worth noting here that David Gilcrease was a primary facilitator of Lifespring, which was known for their large group awareness trainings throughout the 80s and was later deemed 'a cult' after a series of court cases with charges that included involuntary servitude and wrongful death.

It's also worth noting that Cross Creek's program tuition for a single child reportedly cost over four grand a month, almost \$54,000 annually. and it was just one of a large network of centers led by Robert Lichfield and his colleagues. He created an organization known as WWASP. The Worldwide Association of Specialty Programs in Schools had over two dozen locations, so I'll let you do the math.

Lindsay spent 22 terrorizing months at Cross Creek where she was strip searched, socially isolated from her family and friends and forced to not only witness psychological abuse, but to engage in attack therapy toward her peers. All communication in and out of the facility was monitored. Parents were manipulated and speaking out against leadership was not an option. The only way to make it through was to level up and age out, and that's exactly what she did.

Lindsay has agreed to bravely share her story with us today because while Cross Creek is no longer in operation, facilities like it and small group interventions that are similar continue to operate all across the country. Lindsay hopes that by speaking out today, she can do her part to bring more awareness to survivor stories and the problems inherent in the industry. She and I both hope to inspire parental accountability and activism in the hopes of catalyzing changes to state and federal legislation.

Perhaps what I find most moving about Lindsay's story is the fact that she is now a mother herself. And in this conversation she demonstrates how it is possible to turn the two worst years of her life into the will to do better for the next generation.

Today, Lindsay offers us not just her story as a survivor, but hope for the future.

Well, good morning.

Lindsay Spyker: Good morning.

Candice Schutter:

So how are you feeling coming into this conversation today?

Lindsay Spyker: Well, I've been nervous, but I've been excited just to, um, like leading up to this point. I've always had a hard time sleeping after I left there. So the last couple days I haven't slept well, just cuz I'm like, think about it and it brings up old stuff. So, um, that's why I had said I'm ready to get it over with. Ready to, you know.

So, cause I, you know, it's, it's something you think about every day. But more, you know, when you have something like this to, you know, talk about it. So,

Candice Schutter: Well, I'm glad that you mentioned that because I think you bring up a really important point around the sharing of these stories and why and if it's important for whom, right? So it's, it's an edge for you to do this. It brings up stuff. It's, you know, some might argue is it re-traumatizing? And so I'm curious to hear from you why you wanted to do this, knowing that it would be uncomfortable.

Lindsay Spyker: um, okay, so being at Cross Creek, the program I was in there was always, you were always put on silence. So you never were able to speak unless you were told you could. So even after leaving, I feel like I was silenced for so long. So speaking today is validating, empowering, just people who wanna listen, uh, I'll talk to.

Candice Schutter: Yes. Yes.

Well, I commend your courage and I, I know that sort of bittersweet pill of, of needing to speak out and then having to wade through the discomfort of doing so. And I'm hoping that it's like it's been for me on the other side of this for you, that there's a sense of liberation and I, I have a feeling that you have experienced that yourself in sharing your story in the way that you have so far. As you've been coming to terms with it. And we'll get into the story in a moment.

But do you wanna speak to that at all? Like how has speaking up and speaking out been of benefit to you?

Lindsay Spyker: Well just being heard and when you're able to talk about it and get it out, it is healing.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Lindsay Spyker: to, to be able to talk about it and people listen and acknowledge and validate that these things happened, and it wasn't okay that they happened. Um, so

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Lindsay Spyker: It's empowering. And yeah, liberating is a good word. Uh, that's how I felt when we did the Provo protests at one of the schools that's still open. That weekend felt very liberating to, um, you know, be seen and heard and, and the truth come out.

Candice Schutter: So these schools are still operating. Is is, I'm assuming part of the reason why you're speaking up today.

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah. So the school I was in is closed. It was called Cross Creek. It was in Utah. They had this big umbrella company called WASP, Worldwide Associations Specialty Programs. Those have all closed now, but what happens is they just open up under a new name. Same therapist, same people in charge, and they keep getting away with this.

So, yeah, we're trying, all of us survivors who went through this are trying to speak out and let everyone know what happens in these places. And it's more damage in the end.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Which is why I think it's so important for you and other survivors who've experienced what you've experienced to share the details and the nuance of the story because it's real easy, and I find this a lot in learning myself in the world of cult recovery and, and being part of the education world, it's like there's such a tendency to look at a specific organization and say that's the problem. But in reality, these tools of manipulation can be used under any umbrella. And so when you speak to the actual experience and the specificity of it, then it's not attached to a specific brand. Cuz they can just change the brand name, right? They can change that up as much as they want. So you sharing the details is so important because people can recognize like, hey, this thing that is called something entirely different seems a little bit similar. Maybe my red flag should, should be raised. Yeah.

Lindsay Spyker: Yes. Yeah.

And this has go, this goes back many, many years. Like before, you know, there was these WASP schools and the school I was in. Or I don't really like to call it a school. They called it school, but it, it was a, a program.

Um, I mean it happened, you know, years ago and it just, you know, there's a timeline where it just branches down to something new and

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Lindsay Spyker: keeps on going. And they're still open. Kids are still being sent to these places.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. Well, thank you for being courageous enough to, to have a couple sleepless nights leading into this so that we can all benefit and hopefully you can, too.

Lindsay Spyker: I'm used to it. So.

Candice Schutter: Well, let's get into, let's get into it a little bit. Um, I think what would be helpful for all of us, I mean I've talked with you a little bit, but for the listeners to really hear a little bit about kind of your background, your childhood, like sort of leading up to this experience. Like what was your childhood like, and tell us a little bit about your family and everything that sort of led up to this. Like what kind of an environment were you raised in?

Lindsay Spyker: Well, I have a sister. And mom and dad still married. Growing up, you know, my mom was a RN, but once we started school, she quit her job so she could be there to monitor us and, and be there. She always said she didn't want us to be latchkey kids. But it was a lot of control and strict environment.

Um, my dad, he was a financial advisor. I feel like I had a privileged childhood growing up where I could do any sports I wanted. I tried ice skating, tennis, soccer, dance, like, uh, I think my mom kind of lived through us seeing us do those kind of things. But what was lacking for me was like the love and emotional connection.

So like in our family I've never seen my parents hug or kiss and we didn't hug. We didn't show that emotion. So I, I think that was lacking. My father, he was an alcoholic growing up, but a functional alcoholic. So, you know, he'd go to work every day and everything was fine. But, you know, I was scared of him a lot. I have some memories of, uh, hiding from him. And discipline. It was like my dad would use the belt as discipline. So that was, for me, that was, you know, traumatizing. Made me push away from my parents more, right?

Um, so yeah, I think I just, I didn't, I was jealous of my friends that had, you know, the mom they could talk to, the parent they could talk to. I didn't have that person to talk to, so I definitely pushed away for sure.

Like, we go to church every Sunday, we, you know, probably looked good on the outside, but on the inside it just, you know, it was hard.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Did you and your sister adapt to that environment in different ways, do you think?

Lindsay Spyker: I think, you know, I talked to her over the weekend. Cause I told her I was doing this. So we talked about like memories and growing up and she felt the same way I did.

I just I was kind of like the more free spirit in the family. So I wasn't, you know, towards the end my parents felt they didn't have control over me. And that's what they were scared of is losing that control they had over me.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm. So was it this, sort of, this dynamic that you're describing, how did that snowball to the point where your parents felt like they needed outside support with you? Like, can you tell us a little bit about the circumstances that led up to you having the experience that you had?

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah. So, you know, my parents put me in different therapy growing up. Um, you know, a lot of it was cuz my, my dad decided to quit drinking. So we had to start going, seeing his therapist, too, um, with him. And I just pushed away more and more. I definitely had a chip on my shoulder, I would describe it. Um, but I felt alone. I felt like I didn't wanna go talk to a therapist I wanted to talk to someone I knew or family or, yeah.

I was very active in, in my high school. I played varsity soccer. I was on an Olympic development team for the state of Oregon. So I was really involved in, in sports. But I started skipping school. I had an older boyfriend at the time that my, my parents didn't approve of. And I mean, I was grounded a lot. I remember that. Grounded and isolated at home. But I remember they were gonna switch me schools. We went and checked out a alternative school and a private school, and I just said, I'm not, I'm not gonna change schools. Like this is, you know, this is my friend group. My, you know, I have soccer. I wanted to play in college. And, and so I remember my dad saying, Well, we'll just send you away. And I remember saying, do it. And so he said he did. You know, and then he told me that later. You, you said to do it. So

Candice Schutter: Hmm.

When you said that to him. I mean, and part of me is wanting to, and I know you and I both kind of wanna get into it a little bit, like how to do this differently, right, with, with teens.

When he said, I, we will just send you away, and you said do it, it sounds like you were feeling really misunderstood and not seen and heard in your family. I don't wanna speak for you, but that's kind I'm hearing. Am I right?

Lindsay Spyker: No, that's definitely true. Yeah.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. So when somebody says to you, I'll send you somewhere else.

Lindsay Spyker: Mm-hmm. I mean, I was kinda like, it might be better than here.

Candice Schutter: Right? Yeah, exactly. Turns out not so much. But I guess it would've depended on what choice they made, right? Um, yeah. So I think that's really just important to underscore for a moment. Like if, when there's that pushback from the child saying like, I don't feel like I fit here anyway.

Lindsay Spyker: Mm-hmm.

Candice Schutter: um, that's important information just for, for us to pay attention to and how we respond to that. I mean, this way of responding that led to all this trauma in your life is one choice that someone might make. And we wanna speak with empathy to that, to the parents who, you know, and we'll talk about how your parents didn't really know what

Lindsay Spyker: mm-hmm.

Candice Schutter: they were sending you into, um, but to just say I think it's, it's, critical to understand like from the perspective of a teen who's not being seen and understood, being sent away might not sound all that bad.

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah.

Candice Schutter: At first, right?

Lindsay Spyker: Definitely.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

So your, your parents are sending you to therapy. They're trying, you know, to get through to you in the way that they can.

Lindsay Spyker: Mm-hmm.

Candice Schutter: But they're not really able to meet you emotionally,

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah.

Candice Schutter: psychologically.

Lindsay Spyker: And they kept sending me to these therapists, like, fix my kid. You know, my mom wasn't in therapy. It was a whole family dynamic. My dad was, cuz he, he was working on not drinking anymore. But, you know, it was, for me, it felt like, fix my kid, something's wrong with her. It's not us. You know, it's her.

So eventually sending me away to Utah felt the same as well.

Candice Schutter: Yes.

Lindsay, I'm so glad that you said that. I think that's such a key piece here. Even the, it's called the troubled teen industry, right? This whole label of like the troubled teen, and not zooming in and saying like, what's the source of the trouble, really? It's a complex system. A family dynamic, a family system that's ill, right?

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah.

Candice Schutter: But then it's all, it's all projected onto the child, so I really appreciate you underscoring that. Yeah.

So tell us how this pivotal night in your life unfolded, like what were things like leading up to that moment, and then tell us about that moment.

Lindsay Spyker: So I could tell after, you know, I said to my dad, do it. He's not the man that where you challenge him, he is not gonna come through, follow through. So I knew things were kind of different in the house. So I remember I went to school that day and I said to my friends like, something's going on. You know, I'm worried they might send me away. And so I remember ditching school that day, going to my friends and just like trying to figure out what I was gonna do. Like run away or you know, something's gonna happen. I had that feeling.

But you know, my mom called around all my friends. They ended up finding me. I was hiding in a closet at my friend's house.

Candice Schutter: Wow.

Lindsay Spyker: And so, um, they got me. It was a weird night cuz you know, they knew I was wanting to run away. That night, they were so nice. Like, what do you want for dinner? Let's go get some food. Let's watch a movie. So that was weird cuz they were never like that to me. Wanting to spend time with me like that. So something was going on, but I remember going upstairs and going to bed.

In the middle of the night I came downstairs to get a drink or something and my dad was sleeping on the couch by the front door. So, you know, I find out later the program, you know, after you hire someone to come get your kid, like, make sure they don't get outta the house, cause they pay a lot of money for them to come get you.

So, um, I just, I didn't know. I thought, oh, maybe he doesn't want me to run away. So I went to bed and, and I woke up early morning, 3am, 4, um, with two people standing at my bed. Um, so my parents weren't in the room. I was, didn't know what was happening.

Like, you know, two people in your room, over your bed telling you to get up, get dressed. Um, you know, they always say, we can do this the easy way or the hard way. And I wasn't, um, I was a pretty compliant kid. Yeah, I was rebellious and impulsive, but, you know, I wasn't gonna fight 'em or anything. I was like, okay, i, I got up. I didn't say a word. And got dressed and they took me downstairs. I had no idea what was happening.

Candice Schutter: And tell us how old you were.

Lindsay Spyker: I just turned six, like two months prior turned 16.

Candice Schutter: Hmm. So they took you downstairs And was your family there?

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah. My mom, my dad and my sister were standing there. I didn't say a word to them. I just went with these people and got in the car with them.

Candice Schutter: And then you were taken where?

Lindsay Spyker: To the Portland Airport and then flew to Las Vegas and then drove with them to La Verkin Utah to Cross Creek.

Candice Schutter: So what was happening in your heart and mind, like when you arrived there, like what'd you think it was? Or did you have any idea? Was anyone communicating with you.

Lindsay Spyker: No, I had no idea. Um, the people that took me, we didn't talk much. When they dropped me off at the door, they said, we'll come back to visit. And I never saw them again, so.

Walking through those doors, you know, everything's gated, and cameras and alarms on the doors. So you walk in and the door shuts and, you know, I was scared. I didn't have any idea what, what was happening.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

Lindsay Spyker: So when you first get there, you, um, you go into a room. You're strip searched. You're given clothing. You wear slippers and you wear kind of these blue sweatpants and a polo shirt. And there's all these different colors of polo shirts. So depending on what group they put you in, cuz there's so many girls there and so many groups, everybody's color coordinated, so they can keep track of you during, you know, your time there.

So they, put me into this room with two upper level girls to kind of explain, this is where you are, this is what's going on, and you're gonna be here a long time.

Candice Schutter: Hmm. They say that you're gonna be here a long time?

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah. The old, I mean the two girls I was talking to, they were the upper level girls and one had already been there a year and one had been there, you know, longer than a year. So then at that point I knew I was gonna be here a long time.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

So that knowing is based on these levels that you're describing, can you describe the levels to us? Because you have to progress to a certain point in order to be released. Is that correct?

Lindsay Spyker: Yes. Yeah. There's six levels. And you have to be level six and recommended home by your therapist to go home. And, you know, they tell your parents this, that unless you're level six recommended home, you shouldn't leave. And when people did

leave, the word was terminated. They were terminated. So you're like, oh my so-and-so's not here today. Yeah, they were terminated because like their parent pulled them from the program or ran outta money cuz it was very expensive program.

So level, level one, you're not allowed to talk to anybody outside of your group. You don't have privileges. I mean there wasn't really privileges there most of the time, but you start thinking things are privileges when you can, you know, start crocheting or you know, like

Candice Schutter: Right.

Lindsay Spyker: some of the things they had you do while you were there.

Level two, you could have a phone call with your parents, supervised by your therapist. So it's like a three-way. You're in the room with your therapist and your parents call in on speaker, so you're there with your therapist talking to them. And the only other way to communicate was through letters written home to your parents, which were read by the staff before you sent them.

Candice Schutter: hmm.

Lindsay Spyker: And they weren't allowed to visit you till three or four. But level three, you gotta stay on the property with your parent. They weren't allowed to take you out, off property.

Candice Schutter: So tell me a little bit about like, because you understand sort of the quote unquote philosophy of this program and like what they were supposedly doing to rehabilitate you. Why do you think it is that so many of these parents agree to this program where there's an, there's a sense of isolation from their own teen? Like what was, how was that spun to justify?

Lindsay Spyker: I found out later my parents received a brochure from this program that you know, they ride horses. They do this. They go on activities. I mean, it was all a lie. There was no horses. There was no, you don't see outside, you know, the gates around had white slatts in them, so you can't even see on the other side of a fence.

So unless the parent went to visit before they sent their child, which I think was strongly discouraged, parents just trusted these people that this is what's gonna happen and it's gonna be a good experience. So I really wish my parents would've gone there to see the place before they trusted these people they didn't even know to take their child.

And so those are red flags that I wish would've been caught.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. Yeah. Which is what, part of what we're wanting to share here is like in these situations where there's, which, you know, I would argue don't send your kid to a reformatory school.

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah. That's a good start.

Candice Schutter: If you're.

But if there's, if there's a place that you're considering your child to visit, even for a weekend, for God's sakes, right? Like just to really understand what's happening there and to not take the glossy brochure at face value or the fancy bios or whatever.

Lindsay Spyker: You know, the parents were definitely manipulated as well.

[00:31:31] transition?

Candice Schutter: There's the isolation from your family, and then what was the dynamic like with your peers? Like, was there a sense of support there or?

Lindsay Spyker: Well, I mean, you knew that being there you were alone. All you had was yourself, right? You had other girls that, you know, were friends, but they didn't want you to get too close as friends. Like if you had someone you were got really close to, then they would move you to a different group. So I mean, I call all the survivors I was there with my friends cuz no one knows, you know, unless you were there what you went through. And they understand.

But they definitely, you know, they didn't want you to get too close to people. You couldn't trust other people cuz they wanted to move up in their program too. So, you know, I remember telling one of my friends, I, I didn't like one of the therapists. I had to like five different therapists while I was there. And one of 'em I just wasn't fond of. And, you know, my good friend went and told her I had said these things about her. So, you know, you lose trust like that, you know, cause then she looked good. She could probably move up cuz she did that. But I was put on silence for a month. I couldn't talk to anybody.

Candice Schutter: So you were, you had a, like a vow of silence essentially for

Lindsay Spyker: yeah. That hap, that was normal. Yeah. For a month I couldn't communicate or talk to anyone.

Candice Schutter: Were you placed in isolation during that time?

Lindsay Spyker: Not during that time. No. Um,

Candice Schutter: But at other times?

Lindsay Spyker: Yes.

I mean, girls went in isolation all the time, like physically restrained, drug down the hall into isolation.

Candice Schutter: Wow.

So you're going to, and I'm gonna put quotes around this word therapy.

Lindsay Spyker: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Candice Schutter: Because it sounds like what you experienced was a little questionable in terms of that. And these seminars that are progressing you through these supposed levels, along this hierarchy, that will eventually set you free if you become compliant enough, it sounds like.

Lindsay Spyker: Yes.

Candice Schutter: Tell us a little bit about therapy or seminars. Like what, what was that like? What happened

Lindsay Spyker: Okay. So we'll start with therapy So, you had group therapy Monday through Friday, sometimes Saturday, but usually just Monday through Friday. My first time in group therapy, so, you know, the new person always has to get up. So we're in a circle with a therapist. I had to stand up and they had me write a confession letter to my parents once I got there. And I think that was part of them, you know, write this confession letter, they give it to your parents and then your parents were like, oh, she really needs to be there now. Cuz you know, a lot of the things that were my confession letter they didn't even know about, you know?

So, my first experience at group was standing up and telling 'em why I'm there. And they had this, you know, thing, they ask you are you open to feedback? You always have to say yes. You can never not be open. And that's when one by one, each girl would come to your face, you know, nose to nose and just pretty much tell you how awful of a person you are.

Candice Schutter: Hmm.

Lindsay Spyker: and you know, they do that cuz you know, they just break you down. They get you in your most vulnerable state where you're, you know, they ask you why you're there, and I brought up growing up and alcoholism in my family, and then they're saying, oh, well you're being a victim. You know, you're a victim. You can't keep saying that. I'm like, well, stop asking me what happened in my past, like, you know, and um.

So it was just, you know, I was for 22 months alert of what might happen the next day. Who's gonna get called out in group. Who's, you know, there was tons of verbal, emotional, and mental abuse. And then you were expected to do the same to your peers, you know, tell 'em how awful they were and there's a lot of like, guilt in that.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

And how can you foster friendships when that's the structure? I mean, it.

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah. They didn't want you to. Yeah, they didn't want you to have friends. Um, you know, you couldn't hug, you couldn't touch, it was just you. It was you, on your own.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Lindsay Spyker: trying to make it through.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

So you're going through this program, you're experiencing trauma upon trauma I would argue just being in this space, witnessing abuse, being abused yourself, being isolated, all the things. Are you also experiencing a sense of being indoctrinated into what they're teaching you? Or are you feeling that rebel spirit the whole time? Like what's going on with that?

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah. So that rebel spirit went away for sure. Um, I mean, I felt like I always kept like a piece of me inside. I meant, I kept telling myself like, you can't let yourself go completely.

And one thing that, you know, all the girls would always say like, fake it til you make it. That's how you get outta here. You just gotta fake it. You gotta like follow this stuff. And, and at some point in following it and listening to it every single day while you're isolated, you start believing it. You start being programmed.

The seminars were probably the hardest for most everybody there. What happened in those seminars. Cuz it was about intimidation and, you know, these seminars were based off the Lifespring program and seminars they used to have. So one of the people that was, um, involved in that, formed these specific seminars and was hired by the WASP programs to have these at all their schools. So you knew if you didn't make it through these seminars, you weren't, and they'd kick you out of seminars. So I was kicked out of one. And then you had to wait another month to go through it again. So there's so much fear going in. And you have to take a vow in there too that you won't tell anybody what happens in these seminars. Like you can never talk to anybody about these seminars even with the girls in the school.

But it was, um, that's where I felt like most of the brainwashing happened, and where I started losing myself as a person.

Um, well I still see it like it comes up today. Like, there's not a day I don't think about being there. Some days are worse, but just words that come out of my mouth sometimes I'm like, oh, that's program talk. And like, you know,

Candice Schutter: Ah,

Lindsay Spyker: It just reminds me of like, some of that stuff's still there, so.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Would you be comfortable giving us a couple of examples of like either what happened in the seminar or that kind of how you feel you were programmed?

Lindsay Spyker: Well, so in the seminar, the first one's discovery and then the second one's called focus, the third one, accountability, and then keys to success. So it.

Candice Schutter: They sound so benign.

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah, none of that happened. Um,

Candice Schutter: Right.

Lindsay Spyker: You know, discovery, their whole thing was like break you down till your most vulnerable moment. Like, stand up in front of this room full of, you know, probably 60 or 80 girls, and tell them your deepest, darkest secret. And then once you did, I mean, it might not be good enough, they might tell you, oh, dig deeper. You're not telling the truth.

And once you did, they like belittled you and embarrassed you and made you feel, you know, at your most vulnerable moment, they crushed you even more. Um, so, you know, there were girls in there with me who like had a parent die at home and they would say, you killed your parent. Um, girls that rape victims. You asked to be raped, um, molest, molestation. Like, what did you do for this to happen to you? So there was so much blaming that like every single person was broken in there.

And then, you know, you're going off like no sleep. They have you in there from, you know, like 9:00 AM till midnight. You go home and do all these assignments in your notebook and come back. And so you're physically, mentally, emotionally drained. Don't eat much and really tired. So I think that was their way of breaking you down, you know, cuz if you are conforming to your parents you look good and they probably get more money from, it's all a money thing in these places. They weren't genuinely there to help us. Um, it did the opposite to a lot of people, everybody there.

Candice Schutter: So when you got to the point, the level at which you were allowed to communicate with your parents again and sort of reconnect and forge that relationship, were you already broken to the point where you, didn't feel like you could say that something was wrong? Or was, was your communication monitored to such a degree that there was no room to let your parents know, like, Hey, this is happening. Like, tell us how played out.

Lindsay Spyker: So I think you had to go through discovery, the first seminar to even be able to have a conversation with your parents over the phone, with your therapist. So you've already made it through that. So they know how to get you through enough to where you're like, okay, I gotta keep complying cause I'm, I'm moving up, right.

Um, my parents, when my parents came to visit me for the first time, um, the program also puts a lot of girls on medication. So they have, you see this guy and he gives you whatever he thinks you need. So I was put on a really high dose of Ritalin. And had never been on

medication prior. You know, like for, you know, an hour, I was like super hyped out and then I was like a zombie the rest of the day.

So when my parents first saw me for the first time and noticed that, and told the program, take me off the medication. Like they knew something was weird, so they're like, this isn't, you know, our free spirited Lindsay, right? Like that's going away.

So they were able to come in and we had to stay on grounds. So you, they put you in a room and you talk to your parents. And you know, all the girls knew from experience, from seeing, you know, another person tell their parents that the program has already told them, your kid's gonna try and manipulate you. If they say anything, let us know.

So we already knew, and you know, and you don't really trust your parents cuz they sent you there and they trusted these people. So it's like, if I tell them, they might tell. I couldn't trust, they wouldn't, and you know, then you, you drop back down, you go in isolation and you're, you know, you never go home. Um, so I wasn't able to tell 'em. I didn't trust I could tell them and yeah, I just, I couldn't.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. Makes perfect sense.

So you progress through these levels.

Lindsay Spyker: mm-hmm.

Candice Schutter: You're being broken down, you're experiencing this abuse, and you get to a certain point where maybe was it like about a year or more in when you, did you go home for a home visit? And there was some sort of moment where you kind of almost escaped the situation.

Lindsay Spyker: Yes. So I made it to level five. So I was able to get a home, a home pass. So I flew home, and actually when I was gone, one of my best friends from high school had passed away and I wasn't able to come home to her funeral. And so my mom let me go, with her supervision, see my friend's sister, and talk to her. Like she had her ashes, and I just wanted to connect. And so I went and met with her.

And at that point I had somehow arranged with her like, I really wanna see some of my old friends, which were considered for the program, they're like non-working friends. You're a working person or a non-working. So we weren't allowed to communicate with non-working people. So those were old friends. Right.

So you know, I snuck out that night, and I met with my old friends and I was just telling them. So at this point I was 17, had been there about a year and was telling them like, I can't go back to this place.

You know, like when you're isolated you follow, you comply. But in the outside world, you're like, maybe this isn't right. What's happening? Like you'd kind of get a, and that's why they wanted you isolated.

So, you know, I tried to convince my friends, they're still in high school, so, you know, I, junior year I tried to convince them just hide me for a year. Like, you know, after I turn 18, I, I won't go back. They can't send me back.

But at any moment I could go back and then you drop. And cuz they would drop you because they make more money. Like, you have to start over. Oh, your kid needs to be here another year. So I was really scared of that happening. And then my, you know, my friends were like, Lindsay, we can't like hide you for a year. And so I ended up going back in the house and was like, okay, I can do it. I can get to level six, you know, soon in a couple months and come home.

But then once I got back to the program, my parents had found out, you know, all my friends went to school, like we saw Lindsay today, like we haven't seen her in a year. And they had found out. And that's when I was confronted on a phone call with my therapist and my parents. And then that's when I dropped from five to one to isolation room to what they called staff buddy.

And I was on staff buddy for about a month where you just sit, crisscross applesauce, look at the wall and you can't make eye contact with anyone. And, uh, slept in the hallway with staff monitoring you. Um, I mean, you were always monitored. You're monitored during showers. You were monitored, you know, at night.

I think a lot of my sleeping problems are at night cuz I mean a lot of people would harm themselves there, you know, attempt suicide. Everybody was in mental crisis mode. And, so you had night watch come in every 30 minutes, flashlight in your face, make sure you know you hadn't ran, you're still alive. Um,

So I think that's why I have a lot of, I have a hard time sleeping at night. I wake up to like, everything.

And, um, so you know, part of the isolation I didn't mention about there is the building we were in had no windows. We lived in a basement with all the classrooms were down there, therapy rooms, isolation room at the end of the hall and alarms on the doors. So you couldn't see daylight. You'd go out for like, you know, a 30 minute, you know, where you just sit in the other area outside that was, you know, you couldn't see out over the fence. But, that was part of the isolation, too. And you know, parents didn't know. My parents didn't know that. They didn't know we were in a place with no windows and no access to outside world. They thought we were riding horses.

Candice Schutter: Wow. And sort of marveling at how, even if a parent comes on a visit, that they're able to create the appearance of a certain kind of environment when there's what's actually going on.

Lindsay Spyker: Well they would also threaten us like, there's a parent coming, you know, you need to. And then they'd have the upper levels talk to those parents, they would never let a lower level talk to the parents to, cuz they weren't really brainwashed yet, so they could tell 'em, you know, what was going on, um.

Candice Schutter: Huh.

Lindsay Spyker: It was all manipulated.

Candice Schutter: So how, did you eventually, did you age out or did you level up? What happened?

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah, so, um, after, you know, isolation staff buddy, so after that they were like, okay, Lindsay needs to go to the hardest therapist here. So that's when they moved me into a different group. And I had Garth as my therapist who was known to be the scariest, meanest therapist there. So, I was moved into his group, and started my way back up to six.

Candice Schutter: Was that your experience with Garth was that he was the hardest, worst therapist, or what was your experience?

Lindsay Spyker: I think he was, but he wasn't to me.

I would see how he was to everyone else and he was a, you know, intimidating guy. But he, and I always feel bad saying this cause I saw him do so many things to other girls there and, you know, girls crying and being torn apart by him. But, um, he never did that to me. It was weird. I felt like he was like my one person to help me get through this. Which is so weird to say. Cuz he knew what was going on he knew, you know, and still worked there.

Candice Schutter: Did you feel like you could be yourself with him?

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah. I mean I still had to be program talk. But I mean, he would like take me out and go get soda and like you never leave the premises of the program. Like take me on drives and stuff like that. And he really actually listened to things I wanted to talk about. And I feel so weird saying that cuz it's like, not right. None of it's right. But it was like my lifeline, I think.

Candice Schutter: Well the bar was pretty low at that point, my dear.

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah. That's true.

Candice Schutter: I mean, Yeah. I mean, just have someone even hold eye contact and really see you for a half a second probably felt pretty outstanding. And, and, in all, in these environments, every environment, there's usually something positive that we can cling to. I mean, that's how people survive in situations like this, right? So, and I understand like the feelings of like, is it okay to name those things? When I'm, I'm, condemning something and I'm saying this part though actually was helpful to me and I think we need „To make room for that.

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah.

Candice Schutter: Cuz it it helped. It's the reason you're here with us, right? You made it. I mean you made it.

Lindsay Spyker: I, you know, I always say like, the program made me stronger and a lot of people say, well, abuse shouldn't make you stronger. But, um, it, it did. It made me stronger, independent, you know, like all I had was myself. And, so no good thing came from there, but I can try and find good things in myself that, you know, I see from going there.

Candice Schutter: That's beautifully said. Yeah. I mean that's the thing about resiliency and surviving anything right, is it's like that paradox of it doesn't justify what happened, and yet there is a wisdom and a strength on the other side of it. And both of those things are true. Like it doesn't mean it should have happened.

Lindsay Spyker: Mm-hmm.

Candice Schutter: At all. And you know, I see that and feel that and yeah, we don't need to be stripped down to nothing and be broken in order to be set free.

Lindsay Spyker: Mm-hmm.

Candice Schutter: But sometimes that's the way it happens because in being so controlled and tamed, we realize who we really are. Right. It's.

Lindsay Spyker: Mm-hmm.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. It's a painful truth.

[00:51:32] transition

Lindsay Spyker: So I progressed up through level six. I stayed two months after my 18th birthday because I was finishing school and was gonna be recommended home. So you know, your parents get on a phone call with you and say, if you leave at 18 and you're not recommended home, we'll give you \$50 and a bus ticket to Salt Lake and you won't be welcomed here.

So you know, at this point I had been gone for two years. I didn't have friends from home. I didn't have anyone on the outside world. And so your parents telling you you don't stay, um, you're, you're not coming home. But, you know, some people did take the bus ticket and they said, I'm outta here.

Um,

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Lindsay Spyker: It happened. So, um, you know, I knew again I was gonna be going home soon and they were kind of nicer to the girls that were 18 cuz they knew you could walk at any time.

The upper levels had to go do the seminars and be staff in the seminars. So we were going back and doing the harmful stuff that was done to us. We're, we're told we have to do that to the new people. So that's where you know, I have more like guilt. But you, had, it's like you had to do it.

Candice Schutter: Right. Yeah. You're being coerced to do it. There wasn't choice. You didn't choose to do that. Yeah, yeah, for sure.

Lindsay Spyker: So, um, at that point, you know, I stayed the two months, level six recommended home, and then went home. I had to sign a home contract and we had a six level system at home that I had to move up through the levels at home. So at this point.

Candice Schutter: Oh.

Lindsay Spyker: You know, you get out in the real world, which you know, I was gone for almost two years, you know, you miss so much in a two year span. Like, I didn't know, we didn't have like TV or anything there. I didn't know it was happening in the real world? So it was, that was kind of a trip. Um, it was hard. I wa, was very alone.

And then being told, I gotta do this all over again at home and if I break the contract, I have to move out. I was only allowed to talk to my working friends, which were people from the program that had left. So we would talk like through email and phone calls. And I was still talking to Garth after I left. And we act, my mom and dad and I actually flew to visit him and that's when he showed us his new house and took me down to the basement and showed me, this could be your room. You can come live here. Which you know, was odd.

Um, yeah. My parents now think that's very odd cuz they, you know, at the time didn't.

But I think he just saw the environment I was in and just didn't think it was, I think he couldn't see how I was slipping, and this wasn't gonna work out. Like, you know, I wasn't gonna be this working person of how I was supposed to be.

So I came home after that. I stayed for a couple months. I can't remember how long. and I just decided I, I couldn't do it anymore. I just wanted freedom and I still had that piece of me inside, you know, that was me. And I just said, I, I gotta move out. I can't do this.

Candice Schutter: Good for you.

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah.

And they all, everybody cut contact with me after that.

Candice Schutter: Your family and your friends?

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah, all the working program people, everyone, like, you're non-working now, so.

Candice Schutter: Okay. Yeah, that sounds familiar.

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah.

Candice Schutter: So was your relationship with your family, like, was it severed as well? Or you maintained contact with them?

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah. You know, at that point I tried to tell them what had happened there. Um, and they didn't wanna listen. It was like, they saved your life. You wouldn't be here today if you didn't go there. So, you know, I was silenced then too. Like, they didn't wanna hear it, no one wanted to hear it.

So I moved out with one of my old best friends from high school. I moved in with her dad and her.

Candice Schutter: How, how was it adjusting to, so now you've left the school and then you've left your home where there's reinforcing this indoctrination, yet you're still carrying it inside of you. Like, what was that like?

Lindsay Spyker: Well I felt, I felt very robotic. I remember my sister trying to talk to me and like, you know, she's like, you're weird. I didn't know how to be, I had this part of me that I had been for two years, the robotic brainwashing, you know, part and then like the old me that wanted to come out. Um, I couldn't relate. I had my old friends, but I couldn't, no one could understand what had happened. And I didn't wanna, you know, like I'd tell 'em some things, but, you know, never really get into it. Cuz it's, it's it's weird, right? Like it's weird stuff.

Um, so I felt alone.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

And I would imagine given the experience that you had, like how therapy, like helpers were actually the ones who were abusing and harming you. Like where do you turn? I mean, did you have kind of an aversion to like finding support?

Were you gun shy around that I imagine I would've been if I were you.

Lindsay Spyker: Oh Yeah, like I've never seen a therapist since.

Candice Schutter: To this day?

Lindsay Spyker: Leaving. Yeah.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

That's, I mean, that's a huge and deep wound around being able to trust people who are, are, have been assigned to support you. Yeah, I could definitely understand that. Yeah.

You said the words when we spoke the first time, my son saved my life.

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah, for sure.

Candice Schutter: Bring us up to speed from that time when you're still kind of swimming, you're like in this robotic space, you're just moving through the world and, and then, I know it wasn't too much longer after that, that you began to create a family of your own.

And, and how was that a turning point for you?

Lindsay Spyker: So, you know, a lot of my friends that left there turned to drugs, suicide, just couldn't deal with what had happened. I mean, I think coming out, I was in a really dark space too. You know, I had no family support on my own. So when I met my husband, um, I moved in to his apartment. We were roommates. I had a bunch of garbage bags full of clothes, and, that's all I had, you know.

And so during that time, when I got pregnant with my son, there was a lawsuit going around. A bunch of my friends had a class action lawsuit to shut Cross Creek down. And, the attorney sent me the packet. It was a long packet of filling out everything, you know, that happened and, I just, at that point I didn't wanna relive it. I was like, I have a child. I need to, I need to like just, you know, compartmentalize that. Cuz I just wanted to be the best I could be, like as a mom. And so I just was like, I gotta move on now.

And, you know, having my son help me and my husband like, just be able to move forward. Like, all the stuff did happen in the past. I acknowledge it happened, but I myself needed to move forward or else it wasn't gonna be a good situation.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. Yeah. And I just wanna pause here and really underscore that moment and like, how often recovery, it isn't about jumping into the deep end. It isn't about

Lindsay Spyker: mm-hmm.

Candice Schutter: reliving and rehashing the story. It sometimes it's just about surviving it.

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah.

Candice Schutter: For a time. And, you know, like you say, when you don't trust resources in terms of therapy or something that might support you, like trauma-informed therapy, then the things that are lifelines for us. Things like motherhood. Things like looking toward the

future. Things like, you know, being in your body and creating a life. I can see how profound that would be. And you say that he saved your life in the sense that you think, you feel like he was the thing that kept you from going deeper into the darkness.

Lindsay Spyker: Moving forward. Yeah. Not letting myself go there. And just like, this is what I need to do now. You know, take care of my child and move forward. And, you know, I am a loving person, like letting that come out instead of being broken.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

How did this experience that you had impact the way that you mother?

Lindsay Spyker: So, you know, I knew I wanted to do the opposite. You know, I think all parents tried to do their best, but I wanted to do the opposite of what I had growing up. I wanted to be open with my children and communicate. They could come talk to me about anything. And that, you know, happened like I'm so close with my son and daughter. They know everything about everything that's happened in the past. And, you know, I just wanted to build that emotional environment for them and loving environment.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm. And I imagine that has been really healing for the inner child in you.

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Lindsay Spyker: And then with my husband, the hardest part for me is the vulnerable, the emotional and being that way cuz I didn't have that for so long. I didn't have it growing up. I didn't have it in isolation for two years. So learning to not be so independent, express my emotions and, and like hugging is kind of weird for me but, you know, some people need a hug. So I gotta, you know, gotta give a hug. I hug my kids and.

Candice Schutter: Well, speaking of this, there was a detail you shared in our earlier conversation around the fact that you were not only socially isolated, but you weren't allowed to touch anyone while you were in the, in the environment. Yeah?

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah. That was, that was called a sexual misconduct. Um, it wasn't allowed cuz only girls were there. So if you, you know, oh, Lindsay hugged that person, or touched that person, you know, you get sexual misconduct. You go to isolation. You write your essays, you know. Wasn't allowed.

Candice Schutter: So, there's this homophobic, uh, undercurrent running pretty strong. Yeah, okay.

So yeah, you grow up in a home where there's not a lot of physical affection, if any. And then you go to this school where it's literally you're shamed for even having any needs around that. So yeah, I could imagine adjusting in, in relationships in your family has been a process.

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah. Something I try and work on every day. Like, have to acknowledge like, okay. Yeah.

Candice Schutter: So there was a turning point though, it sounds like, in your story where you were ready to start sharing your story. Was that when the Breaking Code Silence movement started? Is that what instigated it for you?

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah. Okay. So, we have these survivor communities, like on social media. That's how a lot of us found each other cuz we weren't allowed to like, have numbers and addresses to communicate once we got out cuz someone might end up being non-working.

So, um, first Paris Hilton came out and spoke. Well she had her YouTube video that came out, which kind of surfaced some of the things that happened there. She wasn't at the one I was at. Um, but similar.

So then, um, there was a protest, the rally that was scheduled outside of Provo Canyon School in Utah. So I attended it. I went and I met some of my old friends that were at Cross Creek with me that I hadn't seen in 22 years. And that was, I mean, just having our voices heard was huge. And we're there protesting, letting people know what happens in these places and they shouldn't be opened.

So after I did that, that's when my parents, you know, my parents never acknowledged what I had to say about what happened, but once Paris Hilton did, they were like, oh, maybe Lindsay's not lying. All these survivors, thousands of survivors telling their stories, maybe she was telling the truth when she got home.

Candice Schutter: Mm.

Lindsay Spyker: So, um, at that point, you know, my mom was like, oh, I hope you had fun in Utah visiting your friends. Like, it was just so surfacey, like, you know. Tell 'em hi. I was like, yeah, I'll tell my friends you said hi, you know? And at that point I just decided, I set my boundaries. For us to even have a relationship, they needed to acknowledge what happened.

They both had to acknowledge what happened. Acknowledge the red flags, and what happened to me when I was there.

Candice Schutter: Wow. That's powerful.

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah.

Candice Schutter: How did that feel?

Lindsay Spyker: Oh, great. I mean, they sh, like they could have acknowledged it over the 22 year span. But at that moment it felt great. I'm standing up and I'm setting my boundaries and, you know, it needs to be acknowledged. There's not gonna be an elephant in the room. So, you know, my mom acknowledged it in a letter she wrote me. And my dad acknowledged it as well. I didn't think my dad was going to, my sister was like, I don't know if dad can do it, but he did.

Um, and you know, and then they wanted me to come over and sit down with them and relive everything that happened when I was there. And I said, no. too late for that. Like, it's not to help me by going and sitting on and telling these things. It, it's like for them. So I, I didn't.

Candice Schutter: Good for you.

Lindsay Spyker: yeah.

Candice Schutter: I mean, that's so key, right? This story is your story.

Lindsay Spyker: Mm-hmm.

Candice Schutter: It's your story in terms of when and where to share it. And also like, what is this in service to

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah.

Candice Schutter: really?

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah.

Who benefits.

Candice Schutter: Right and making them feel whatever. Like it's like their, it's their process to have like you've had yours. It's their process to have and it's not your responsibility.

Yeah.

Lindsay Spyker: I felt I didn't need to go, like, relive the trauma all over again. Um, because I tried so many years to tell them. And I mean we, my parents and I, like, we text. We have the relationship that I want. I can be cordial, and I'm also forgiving. I won't, I don't forget what happened and the choices they made. Um, I can forgive. They didn't know. There was a lot of manipulation from the program. So.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Well, and when it comes to anything, and particularly healing, right, that really our ability to stay out of resentment is all about boundaries, expressing those boundaries. Yeah. So good for you. Yeah.

And what a great example you're setting for your children. How do we have relationships with people who were in some ways responsible for the harm we experienced, whether they meant it or not. I mean, that's really tricky stuff, and it sounds like you're, you're doing a beautiful job of walking that line and taking care of yourself and, and showing your kids how it's done.

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Lindsay Spyker: I'm trying.

Candice Schutter: Bravo. Yeah.

That's so great.

Like you're here sitting with us today sharing this story. So there's a part of you that still feels it's important to, to raise awareness and that your story sort of has a place in this larger narrative and, and its purpose in this movement.

Are you still involved in survivor communities? Is that something that benefits you now? Or, or how's, how's that?

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah. I'm in like three different survivor communities. One specifically for WWASP programs survivors. And then another one for, there's a couple, you know, on social media. Sometimes I need to take a break from it, cuz it can be intense. Um, you know, cause everybody's going through different stages of healing and, and so sometimes I just need to like take a break.

But the whole movement started with Breaking Code Silence. Now it is called Unsilenced. And it's about us being silenced for so long, like now we can come out and speak the truth. So, you know, the point of having this organization is to educate parents on what happens in these places. Not see any more kids have to go through this cuz you know, these places are still open. And, there's been some laws that have been passed. So in Utah now they have unannounced visits by child services. So we never had anybody come check on us when we were there, so that's huge. They're supposed to be allowed communication with their parents alone. These are some new bills that just like passed last year. They're working on some federal legislation as well. And I wrote a couple statements for Oregon, for Senator Sarah Gelser. She's a huge advocate in fighting for, you know, the abuse that a lot of kids have been going through. And so that was, to stop people being kidnapped in Oregon and sent to another state.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

So these, these places are still operating. What are your thoughts around these types of situations like where a child is removed from the home and sent away? As somebody who's been in granted a, a really abusive example of this, like what do you think about it in general?

Like sending your child away to some sort of place that's supposedly gonna rehabilitate them? Is it something you believe in?

Lindsay Spyker: No. I think it's the worst thing you could do to your child.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Lindsay Spyker: Like in the long run, it's the worst thing.

Candice Schutter: Mm-hmm.

And I can see, you know, the listeners can't see you. Like I can see the emotion on your face as you say that. And it's, it's moving me almost to tears because part of the reason I wanted to have you on, aside from the obvious of us wanting to raise awareness around this, is I think it's really important for any parent to listen to a conversation like this to really understand, like, I, I have a lot of empathy for the desperation that a parent might feel if their child is in crisis.

And to say that this particular choice to separate the child from the family, even if they're going to a supposedly constructive environment, leaves a lasting, lasting mark on the child and that there are so many other ways.

Like what do you wish had happened aside from, you know, your parents being emotionally available in certain ways? Let's say that they're the same people that they are, and they were in this moment that this like sort of crossroads with you. What do you think would've been, would've helped you?

Lindsay Spyker: Well, I wish, I think I wish in those times when I was acting out and struggling, I wish they could kind of put their stuff aside and just have a real, genuine, loving conversation with me and see how they could help me instead of their solution. Like, We're gonna fix you here, we're gonna fix you here. Like, sending me all these places to get fixed. So I felt like, you know.

Candice Schutter: You were broken.

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah. Yeah.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Lindsay Spyker: So the communication was huge. Um, yeah.

I would, I would never send my child to any of these places, so I don't understand the state of mind of where they were at with. I think it was like, we send her away, the headache's gone, the, you know what I mean? We can control what she's doing, and it was just easier for them.

Candice Schutter: Well, and when we have a core belief, which I think is, is part of the, you know, epidemic of cult dynamics in this country, and the world in many ways is when we have this belief that to comply and to be controllable, like that people have to meet that sort of mark in order to belong or to be loved, right? So if the, the whole structure upon which they're operating is you're out of control, and that's a problem. That really being able to sit down with you and have a conversation around like that sees under that, right? That's like, it's not about control. It's like, why are you uncontrollable? Because you're attempting to communicate something right? If they were curious to hear.

So, um, and we share all this, not to pick on your parents at all, but just to say this is really common, you know this, it's funny as we're talking about this, your cat is.

Lindsay Spyker: I know, I can hear her.

Candice Schutter: Getting into trouble behind you. Troubled teen cat. Like getting ready to knock a bowl off of the, you know, it's like how do we respond to this, right? Like, how do we respond with compassion and also with boundary as a parent.

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah. And I think some parents just aren't equipped to deal with emotions or, you know, from their past as well. Though I don't hold it against them. I'm just saying that, I mean, that's probably what I needed during that time. You know, everybody wants to be the best parent or better than what they had. It's just sometimes you just don't, uh, know how to do it, right?

Candice Schutter: Of course. Yeah.

Which is why education and conversations like this are so important. Like we can't, we can't see what we can't see. If we've never learned, we've never been taught what to even look for. Like how, how would we know.

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah.

Candice Schutter: Like, how would we know. They did the absolute best that they could and unfortunately this one choice they made and they were also manipulated, um, led to this experience that you have and led you to this moment where you unfortunately have this story to share with us that fortunately is going to really open a lot of eyes and hearts.

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah. I hope so too.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

What would you like listeners to take away from your story the most? As somebody who, it's very clear to me that you're not about reliving your trauma and trauma porn and, all that stuff. That's not your jam at all. You're here for another reason. Like what do you want listeners to take away from this?

Lindsay Spyker: Well, I think a lot of people think the troubled teen industry is, like these are bad kids. They deserve to be there. Not knowing what really happens there. Not knowing like, these kids are great. Like I met some amazing girls there that had just gone through so much trauma in their life, you know, and didn't know how to deal with it or work through it.

So these aren't bad kids and you don't send your kid away to get fixed.

Um, Speaking today, just like bringing awareness, about these, all these schools that are still open, and you know, I always say it's like instead of sharing my story, I'm sharing my truth cuz this is my truth. And speaking out for myself to, to help others and just feel, like, heal, you know?

Candice Schutter: Yeah. Yeah.

Well, I'm deeply grateful that you trusted me and us with your story. I know this isn't something that you do every day and it just has meant

Lindsay Spyker: Yeah.

Candice Schutter: a lot that, that you felt safe enough to share. And is there anything else that you wanna say before we wrap it up?

Lindsay Spyker: Well, thank you for having me to share my truth here. each time it happens, it just is more empowering. And it, it helps in the healing process, so thank you for wanting to know about what happens in these places. You know, a lot of people haven't wanted to know.

So, for me, to be able to speak today to you is very helpful to me in my healing and moving forward.

Candice Schutter: I'm so glad, I'm so honored, and giving folks the opportunity to share their story and express it in a way that feels constructive in long form. You know, it's like in the age of social media, like how are you supposed to share about something like this? And, you know, however many characters Instagram allows or whatnot, right?

Um, so, it means more to me than you know, for you to say that it serves you, cuz it's really what this is all about as far as I'm concerned.

And, and I think it's great that other people benefit in hearing it, but really what's most important to me is that you, the sharer, feel served by having expressed it.

So, yay.

Lindsay Spyker: Yay.

Candice Schutter: Thank you. Thank you so much.

I so appreciate Lindsay's courage to share her story with all of us today, and I hope that it's at very least inspired you to reconsider this whole misnomer of the 'troubled teen.' Labels of this sort are inherently culty because they're so shortsighted. Not only do they ignore things like neuro divergence and socially systemic variables, they pathologize natural feelings of discontent and what it is to just be human. The organic and awkward nature of adolescent development where uniqueness is so often squelched and therefore experimentation and rebellion run rampant. And they challenge us as adults to grow up emotionally. To stop mistaking a cry for help as a disrespectful personal attack on the hierarchy, when all it really is, is an age appropriate bid for deeper, more authentic connection.

And I know some of you might be saying, but you're not a parent, Candice. You don't know how difficult it is to raise a teen. And you're right, I don't. Which is why the voices of survivors and parents like Lindsay are so important.

I will say this though, I do some volunteer work in the foster system and I've seen firsthand the impact that can be made when grownups learn how to set aside their egos and show up wholeheartedly for a child who's in crisis. We must stop offloading the work that is ours as adults to do onto our children. We must stay connected to them, pull them closer when they're in pain, and speak out against an industry that commodifies and in many cases, only serves to exacerbate their suffering.

I am providing some links in the show notes for various advocacy groups who are seeking solutions to the troubled teen industry crisis, and I hope you'll take the time to explore them.

And if you know a parent who's looking to send their teen to an outside environment for intervention, have the difficult conversation, encourage them to do their research, and make it your business to advocate for someone else's child.

As always, thank you so much for listening, and I do hope you'll consider taking a moment to rate and review the podcast on your favorite streaming app.

I'll be back next week with another episode in the 'cult'ure series as we continue tapping into the deeper pulse in the hopes of restoring agency one story at a time.