

## Get Me Out of Here

### My Recovery from Borderline Personality Disorder

Rachel Reiland

#### Prologue

How could my mother have done this to me? She told me that kindergarten would be such fun. She lied. She wanted me out of the house and out of her hair—the same as always.

Mrs. Schwarzheuser knelt beside Cindy, heaping praise on her perfect yellow-green trees. Cindy's mother would be so proud. My orange, purple, and brown paint had run together, and my picture looked like a putrid blob.

Golden-haired Cindy was Mrs. Schwarzheuser's favorite. I hated her—those perfect little ringlets tied up in colorful ribbon, that perky little nose, the blue cotton dress with the frilly lace around the collar. Ribbons, lace, dresses—sickening. Mrs. Schwarzheuser hated me, but that suited me just fine. I hated her too.

I seethed with jealousy as Mrs. Schwarzheuser showered Cindy with compliments. Suddenly, rage overwhelmed me. I seized a cup of brown paint and dumped half of it over my picture. Glaring at Cindy, I leaned across the table and dumped the other half over her drawing. I felt a surge of relief. Now Cindy's picture looked as awful as mine.

"Rachel!" Mrs. Schwarzheuser yelled. "You've completely destroyed Cindy's beautiful trees. Shame on you. You are a *horrible* little girl. The paint is everywhere—look at your jeans."

My blue jeans were soaked with brown paint. They looked ugly. I looked ugly. Mrs. Schwarzheuser frantically wiped up paint to keep it from dripping onto the floor. Everyone was watching.

I felt my body go numb. My legs, arms, and head were weightless. Floating. It was the same way I felt when Daddy pulled off his belt and snapped it. Anticipation of worse things to come—things I had brought on myself because I was different.

"In all my years, I've never seen a child like you. You are the *worst* little girl I've ever taught. Go sit in the corner, immediately!"

Shame on Rachel. That language I understood. And deserved. I wasn't like the other little girls. I hated dolls and other "girly," pink toys. I hated being a girl more than anything. I wasn't any good at it. If I had been a boy, things would have been different. But somehow God put me into a girl's body by mistake. I wondered if I would go to hell for daring to think God made a mistake.

Mrs. Schwarzheuser was right. I was horrible.

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The concealed amusement of my twelve-year-old classmates sustained me as I swaggered out of Sister Mary's homeroom. My defiance faded the moment the door closed behind me. Although I'd never admit it, the hallway was a lonely, frightening place. Without the admiring glances of my classmates, I was totally alone, praying fervently that the principal wouldn't see me without a hall pass. A futile prayer to a God who loved everyone but me.

Sister Luisa's tall, thin frame emerged from her office. She sauntered a few steps past me then deliberately turned and stared—a piercing gaze that made me wish I could dissolve into the wall.

“Miss Marsten,” Sister Luisa said disapprovingly. “I see you have managed to get yourself thrown out of the classroom again. What was it this time? A smart remark? Or just your usual disrespect?”

Sister Luisa's questions were not intended to be answered: they *were* the answers. She waved me toward her stark office, a place even more frightening than the empty school corridor. The office felt bare and cold despite the charts and religious poems taped to the cinder-block wall. A lone, large wooden crucifix hung behind the worn metal desk. The face of Jesus stared at me with disgust.

“Miss Marsten,” she said, “I am not going to tolerate this type of behavior in my school. The notes we send to your parents don't seem to have much effect. But rest assured, young lady, I will end this nonsense with or without the cooperation of your parents.”

The notes. My parents had no reason to believe the notes. Smarting off in class was one thing; smart remarks at home were unthinkable. Authority reigned there. Control. Express an inappropriate emotion, expect a slap. The same expressionless stoicism Sister Luisa witnessed in her office was the norm at home. I stayed out of the way in the house. My grades and test scores were excellent, so my parents ignored the scathing notes from frustrated teachers.

“You have twisted the brilliance God has given you.” Sister Luisa's ruddy face, pinched by the white headband of her veil, framed a scowling intensity. “It is a sinful waste.”

“Sinful.” “Shameful.” Words so familiar they were a part of me now. *So what, Sister Luisa? Tell me something I don't know.*

“So smug. So smart. You think you're a hero among your friends, don't you? Don't fool yourself. You're their entertainment. They're not your friends. They aren't laughing with you, they are laughing at you.”

My stomach churned, bile rising in my throat. Weightless. Dizzy. The brave demeanor crumbling. Sister Luisa continued, and her face grew harsher. She had penetrated my core and wasn't about to waste the opportunity to humble me. I began sobbing like a little girl. Her thin lips turned upward slightly as she tasted victory. I wanted to disappear.

“We both know that God blessed you with a great talent for words. Words can be used to accomplish something worthy. But words can also destroy. And, young lady, your tongue can slice like a knife. If you don’t control it, you won’t have a friend to your name. Your classmates will fear both you and the destruction your words can cause.”

Fear me. Like a wild animal. Out of control. Crazy. Once again, Sister Luisa didn’t tell me anything new. No one feared me more than myself.

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“You’re going to eat this bacon—even if I have to shove it down your goddamned throat!” My father thrust the plate inches from my face, his eyes wide and threatening.

I knew better than to defy him. Yet, as much as I feared him, the food on the plate was more terrifying. Fat. Dripping, greasy, bloating fat. I could not disobey him, but I couldn’t give in. I could not be derailed from The Diet. Everyone wanted to sabotage The Diet. Friends, teachers, coaches. Now the same man who called my oldest sister “fat ass” when she neared the freezer was determined to make me the same way. Fat. Disgusting. Humiliated. I’d rather he kill me.

“Dad,” my sister pleaded, “she needs help. She needs a doctor.”

Bold of her. And stupid. She never learned.

“What your sister needs is a good kick in the ass.”

“She’s starving, Dad. What does she weigh now? Seventy?”

“Your father is right,” my mother interjected, her voice cracking with emotion. She used this tone so frequently that no one paid attention. “She’s fifteen years old. She’s a bright girl. She’s just going through a phase.”

“It’s not a phase. She’s sick. She’s anorexic. If she doesn’t get help, she’s going to die,” said Nancy.

“What do you mean—help?” My father’s focus shifted to her and away from me. The question needed no answer. It was a dare.

“I mean a psychiatrist,” she answered.

“A *psychiatrist*?” he roared. My mother tried to calm him down.

“Nancy, honey, you know we can’t do that,” my mother said. “What would people say? Your sister is an intelligent girl. She’s just stubborn. She’ll come to her senses.”

My father leaned toward Nancy and shouted, “She needs a kick in the ass, not a shrink!” Nancy cowered in retreat.

Another fight between the three of them, talking about me as if I had left the room. I shoved the two strips of bacon into my mouth. Peace broker once again.

“See! You can’t coddle this kind of bullshit. You have to put your foot down.”

As the battle continued, I quietly left the kitchen and tiptoed into the bathroom. The bacon, which had been tucked tightly in my cheeks, flew directly into the toilet. The perfect solution. He thought he won. Let him.

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Sitting in the living room waiting on a jar of piss. What a way to spend the weekend. According to instructions, it took two hours for three little drops of urine squeezed into the jar to render judgment. A quarter after ten. Fifteen minutes to go.

Tim read the sports section, occasionally looking up and giving me that reassuring smile that melted me so often. Unbelievably steady. Calm. What a welcome change from the neurotic and narcissistic types I'd been hooking up with for years. In the four months I had known Tim, I still couldn't fathom why this attractive man with sparkling eyes was still faithful—and still around.

He worked in a factory as a line foreman. I had been high school valedictorian—a National Merit Scholar, the varsity field hockey captain, on the dean's list at Saint Robert's. I had worked as a cocktail waitress. Hustled trays of imported beers to arrogant Yuppies, smiling at the measly tips and hating almost every one of them. Hating myself. Smoking joints in the closed bar as the sun rose while my former classmates hit the showers and commuted to the kinds of jobs I should have. I was twenty-four years old.

I'd been through this pregnancy scare before. But Tim was the first man to sit through the grueling ordeal with me. At least this time I could be certain of who the other party to the scare was. At least this time I was nearly convinced that, if anyone could love me, this man might.

It was 10:30 a.m. Tim put his arm around me as we went to check on the jar. My Ouija board to the future. I couldn't bear to look. Tim did the honors, peering into it. He asked for the instruction pamphlet. Clutching it in his hand, he looked into the jar again.

“What is it?” I asked.

He embraced me. “Positive, Rachel. It's positive.”

“Are you sure?”

“Go ahead and look for yourself,” he said gently.

A brown ring, thick and clear, not subtle at all. A bang-you-over-the-head ring. One that says, “You're pregnant, stupid! Now what are you going to do?”

Abortion had always been the fallback position—mercifully, one I'd never had to consider. Being virtually convinced of God's nonexistence, the prospect shouldn't have bothered me. Yet it did.

Now it was time for Tim to leave. Now was the time for the relationship I considered too good to be true to prove that it was. With the abortion option, there was no excuse to be trapped by a situation like this. Yet I felt as if the world were closing in on me, my life catching up with me, as if justice had been rendered. I'd played roulette with an empty box of Trojans and lost.

“Marry me,” Tim said.

What? Didn't he know he didn't need to be trapped? Didn't he know how easy it would be for him to walk right now, that I would understand?

“If you want an abortion, I'll support you. But I'm not talking about a shotgun wedding. I've never met anyone like you, Rachel. I want to spend the rest of my life with you. Trust me on this one. I wouldn't lie to you. Will you marry me?”

I'd taken so many chances in my life. Sex. Drugs. Life had been a series of impulsive gambles. Dangerous moves. Foolish choices. Why not take a chance on this one? Why not marry a man who loved me so obviously even I had begun to believe it?

"Yes."

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Our child passed away in a miscarriage long before its birth. A frenzy of crunching pain, a sea of blood, a small life expelled into the toilet, and sorrow for the life we had already begun to love. Yet the child had created a bond. The wedding went on as planned. The tiny life had fulfilled its purpose. The product of our impulsive recklessness had brought us together in permanence, allowing us to marry for love alone.

Within months I was pregnant again. Jeffrey Aaron Reiland was born in June shortly after we signed the closing papers on our first home. Savoring the newfound joy of nurturing and nursing an infant, I devoted myself to full-time motherhood. Melissa Anne Reiland was born two years later.

It was a period of unparalleled contentedness. A family. A home. A future. The American Dream. Perhaps, I thought, I might just be normal after all.

Alas, no. . . .

## Chapter 1

The house was a disaster.

The kids had strewn toys all over the floor; disposable diapers overflowed the trash can. Crackers lay smashed on the milk-stained hardwood floor. Overloaded ash trays on every tabletop. Fast-food wrappers littered the house.

God, I should get to this. I'm home for chrissakes. What kind of a mother am I? How in the hell can we afford all this fast food—much less what it must be doing to us? *What in the hell am I doing here?*

Picking up an armful of clothes, I headed for the steps. Damned drafty old house. Two years after closing, it was still half done with no money to finish it. Gaping holes in the staircase waited for someone to put up the quarter round—or couldn't we afford that either? Eyeing the antique oak ball we'd put on the stair rail, visions of Jimmy Stewart rushed through my mind. I wished I could slam it down. I had news for Jimmy: it was anything but "a wonderful life." It was a trap.

Finally, the injustice of it all was catching up with me. I was supposed to be someone. Instead, I was broke. Disheveled. A three-year-old and an infant were nursing the life right out of me. They were napping. I was lonely and restless. I headed for the telephone.

"Umm, is Tim there?"

"Please hold, and I'll see if he's still here, Rachel."

God, how I hated that secretary—the way she spit out my name, the way she'd always keep me on hold forever and toy with me as if Tim might not be there, even though she knew very well that he was. She was a goddamned secretary, no less, who thought she was a CEO. And I envied her. *Bitch.*

"This is Tim."

"Hi, Tim. . . ."

Dead silence. What in the hell had I called to say anyway? God, I was pathetic. "Rachel? Are you there?"

"Yes, I'm here."

"Well, what do you want, hon? I'm kind of busy here. I've got an appointment in a half hour."

"Oh."

"Is something wrong?"

"I hate this house, Tim. I just hate it. It's a fucking mess. The kids are napping, but I just don't feel like cleaning it."

"Then don't clean it. Take a nap yourself. I can help you clean when I get home."

"When are you coming home?"

"I dunno. I have a whole-life insurance presentation in a half hour, and then I have a call-in on my annuities ad. I thought I'd go over there at about five."

"Then you won't be home until six or seven."

"I know, but I haven't gotten a lot done lately."

"And it's my fault, isn't it?" I interrupted.

"I didn't say it's your fault, honey. It's just that . . . well, I've got to get some stuff done." I began to twist the phone cord around my finger, tempted to wrap it around my neck.

"I'm a real pain in the ass, aren't I? You're pissed, aren't you?" Tim tried to keep his patience, but I could still hear him sigh.

“Please, Rachel. I’ve got to make a living.”

“Like I don’t do anything around here? Is that it? Like I’m some kind of stupid housewife who doesn’t do a goddamned thing? Is that what you’re getting at?” Another sigh.

“Okay. Look, sweetheart. I’ve got to do this presentation this afternoon because it’s too late to cancel. But I’ll see if I can reschedule the annuity guy for tomorrow. I’ll be home by four o’clock, and I’ll help you clean up the house.”

“No, no, no!”

I was beginning to cry.

“What now?”

“God, Tim. I’m such an idiot. Such a baby. I don’t do a thing around this house, and here I am, wanting you to help me clean. I must make you sick.”

“You don’t make me sick, sweetheart. Okay? You don’t. Look, I’m really sorry, but I’ve got to go.”

The tears reached full strength. The cry became a moan that turned to piercing screams. *Why in the hell can’t I control myself? The man has to make a living. He’s such a good guy; he doesn’t deserve me—no one should have to put up with me!*

“Rachel? Rachel? Please calm down. Please! Come on. You’re gonna wake up the kids; the neighbors are gonna wonder what in the hell is going on. Rachel?”

“Fuck you! Is that all you care about, what the *neighbors* think? Fuck you, then. I don’t need you home. I don’t want you home. Let this fucking house rot; let the fucking kids starve. I don’t give a shit. And I don’t need your shit!”

“Rachel, listen to me. I’m canceling the whole-life appointment, and I’ll be home in a few minutes. Okay?”

“You must really hate me,” I sobbed. “You really hate me, don’t you?”

“No, sweetheart,” he sighed audibly. “I don’t hate you.”

After hanging up the phone, I sat there, frozen, staring at it. Why did I do this kind of shit? Tim was trying hard to build his own insurance business. I knew how much it took to build a business. After all, my father had worked seventy to eighty hours a week running his business. And my mother wouldn’t have dared pull him away from it the way I just yanked Tim home.

My mother. My dependent mother who never did a damned thing with her life. My mother, who spent half her days at the shopping mall and the other half in front of the television set. My mother, who was unable to make the simplest decision without my father. She had been wholly dependent on him. She’d made me sick. And as I sat in the kitchen, the stench of dirty dishes and the overflowing garbage reminded me that even she had been more worthy than me. My God, I thought, I’m ending up to be a dependent little piece of shit. Worse than my mother.

Tim wasn’t able to reschedule the whole-life appointment.

The prospect had gone to a competitor. The annuity prospect fell through as well. He’d been in the business now for over six months and was barely able to meet the business expenses, much less the household ones. This meant having to take handouts from my parents—handouts with many strings attached. Strings of I-told-you-so’s.

I didn't grow up in poverty. Thanks to my parents, I wasn't destined to know what that was like. I did, however, know the bitter taste of failure. It became increasingly hard not to place that same label on Tim. Why, oh why, with all the men I knew and dated—all the men with degrees—had I chosen a college dropout whose only means of making anything significant of himself was selling insurance? Why couldn't he be more of a man, like my father: practical, steady, and successful?

Then again, what was wrong with me? I had lots of credentials but was sitting at home not doing anything.

I began to press Tim to go out and get a regular salaried job with the same insistence I used to get him to come home and be with me. He was beginning to feel like a failure too. His initial zest for the insurance business, his carefully projected income goals, his dreams of huge college funds and a totally renovated house—all of this waned. And so did his ability to close the sale.

Doubting his own ability to succeed in insurance, he began to search the want ads, send out résumés, go on interviews, and get rejection letters. There wasn't much work that paid the kind of money equaling the handouts. He was getting dejected, as was I.

I didn't make it any easier for him. Somehow he was still patient with my constant phone calls. But he was clearly more irritable. If I couldn't handle his absence when he worked at a place where he set his own hours, how would I handle it with a boss who would force him to be there from nine to five? It was a wretched situation, a catch-22, and I hated myself because so much of it was my fault. Yet I couldn't stop making it worse.

If only I could just disappear. Run away. Far away. If only Tim wasn't in the picture, I could have. Indeed, in past relationships I would have been long gone at the first signs of my own dependency. Then I could appear to be independent, not needing a soul.

But it wasn't just Tim anymore. I loved my kids. Perhaps they tied me down. But I loved them. I loved Tim too, of course. But he could make it without me—in fact, do much better without me. Jeffrey and Melissa, however, needed me more than anyone in my life ever had. No, I was just plain stuck in a life that seemed to spiral further downward at every turn.

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It was nearly midnight when we got home from Tim's softball game. It had been a late game followed by some bad directions that led us to drive aimlessly through the West Side for over an hour, doors locked, streets dark, totally lost. We'd blamed each other. The kids were asleep in their car seats. We bickered in hushed tones as we passed block after block of boarded-up brownstones. Juggling irritated toddlers, diaper bags, bat, ball, and glove, we put them to bed and fell asleep ourselves—angry with each other but too exhausted to fight.

I was still in bed when Tim was heading out the door to work. I heard him swearing and complaining that he couldn't find his wallet. I joined him in a search that led us to every room of the house, under every sofa cushion, and through piles of dirty laundry. It had vanished.



“What did you do with it?” he demanded impatiently. “I had *two hundred dollars* in there.”

“What do you mean, what did *I* do with it?”

“I handed it to you, damnit. Don’t you remember? I took in all the softball stuff and Jeffrey; you took Melissa, the diaper bag, and the wallet.”

He was right.

“Well, what the fuck did you expect?” I yelled defensively. “You dragged us to that stupid game way too late and got us lost on the goddamned West Side. Then you expect me to bring all this shit in.”

“Give me a break, Rachel. There was *two hundred fucking dollars* in there. I can’t believe, as much as you bitch about money, that you act like it’s nothing.”

The tears came back. Then the moan. Then the screaming wail. I’d really blown it. But Tim, on this early summer morning, would have none of it. He slammed down his fist, picked up his briefcase, and headed out the front door. He’d never walked out on me when I was crying. I’d crossed the line and driven him out the door. I’d lost him. Forever.

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As it turns out, I didn’t “lose” Tim. He returned at dinnertime as usual—still a little irritated but feeling slightly guilty that he had walked out on me. Shortly after dinner, a neighbor returned the wallet. The two hundred dollars, credit cards, and pictures were still there. The Good Samaritan even apologized for taking so long. Although he’d seen the wallet on top of our car that morning, he had been running late for work and had to wait until evening to return it.

Tim was relieved. I should have been relieved. But now that the missing money was no longer an issue, I started to seethe about how he had walked out on me.

“Well,” Tim said with a smile as he took a long drag on his cigarette, “I guess there’s still some honest people around. Imagine, going to the trouble to return it and apologizing for not giving it to us sooner.”

“Yeah,” I sniffed. “At least *he* apologized.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, you walked out on me this morning, you sonofabitch! You blamed me for everything even though it was mostly your fault.”

“*My* fault?” Tim looked stunned.

“Yes, *your* fault. You dragged us out to that game, didn’t you? We didn’t want to go.”

“You wanted to go to that game.” His patience was fading again.

Twice in a day, I thought, panicked. He’s pissed again. I’m going to drive him away. Why was I so dependent on him? Why can’t I walk out on him?

The moan began again. This time, I didn’t make it to the screaming part.

“No, not again, Rachel. Don’t do this again. I can’t take anymore of it!”

That cinched it. He hated me. He’d leave me, broke, with these two little kids and the piece of shit house. *No, no! He couldn’t leave me. I wouldn’t give the sonofabitch the satisfaction.*

The tears halted immediately, and I felt a rush of energy. Barefoot, in gym shorts, without so much as grabbing the car keys, I ran out the door and down the alley. I could hear Tim pleading with me to come back and frantically apologizing for losing his patience. I felt power rising within me. I didn't look back and kept on going.

I didn't have a destination in mind, but as I kept jogging down the streets of the city, I realized I was heading to the West Side. If I were lucky, I'd make it to the projects. If I were even luckier, the God I didn't really believe existed would have mercy on me and let me become just another crime statistic. Suicide roulette. I ran for miles, barefoot and westward through the glass-strewn sidewalks of declining neighborhoods.

I called Tim. Twice. He answered the phone, relieved to hear from me. He pled with me to come home, apologizing for anything he could think of. He begged me to tell him where I was so he could come and pick me up. Instead I told him I was going to die and that he would be better off without me. I hung up without giving him a clue as to where I was.

I didn't quite make it to the projects. I'd run about five miles, which burned off some of my excess energy and a lot of my anger. It was dusk—about two hours since I'd left the house—and I started to feel afraid. But I wasn't about to call and tell him where I was. That would mean admitting my stupidity. I sat on a park bench and suddenly spied our red Dodge. Tim pulled up, the kids looking out the windows from their car seats.

I climbed in, and he drove home without one word of admonishment. He was too tired and scared, afraid, I guessed, that I'd go running out the door again and the next time I wouldn't be so lucky.

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For the next few weeks I was a tornado, raging out of control, fury swelling, destroying everything in my path. The run became a nightly routine. Tim was concerned about my safety in the darkness of the neighborhood, but he didn't try to stop me from the ritual. Perhaps he was afraid that if he were to resist me, I wouldn't stay within our neighborhood but would instead begin heading westward again. The moans were more frequent now, and Tim stopped making night appointments for fear of what could happen in his absence.

I don't know why, but up to this point, I had not taken out my fears, frustrations, and anger on my children. As wildly erratic as I could be with Tim and others, a calm came over me when dealing with Jeffrey and Melissa. The demons within me were at peace for a while, and I was much more patient with them than a lot of other mothers are with their children. Seldom, if ever, had I become impatient or lost my temper with the kids.

But in the spinning fury of my loss of control, even this bond began to fray. Jeffrey was talking like a boy twice his age. Unfortunately, he was capable of understanding the words I had begun to hurl at him. I saw a stunned look of betrayal in his eyes; he'd never seen anything like this before. He was frightened. And I was frightening myself.

One Friday in late June, about three weeks after my “West Side Run,” I woke up shaky, irritable, and more out of control than usual. I restlessly tried to read a book and lose myself in it in an attempt to kill time.

Jeffrey, however, kept trying to crawl onto my lap. Irritated, I shoved him away, not wanting to touch him. At first Jeffrey thought it was some kind of game. But finally something snapped, and I slapped him so hard he went reeling to the floor.

I looked at him lying there, crying in earnest as the thoughts began to spin in my head. *Jesus Christ, Rachel, you aren't even a good mother anymore. You have nothing. You are hateful, crazy, awful.*

Jeffrey didn't take his eyes off me, nor would he stop crying. He lay there on the floor, wailing, and the sight and sound reminded me of what a wretched human being I was.

“Goddamnit, Jeffrey. Stop it!” I screamed.

Jeffrey didn't stop.

“Goddamnit, you little pain in the ass. Shut the fuck up!”

He didn't.

Overwhelmed with rage, I grabbed him hard by the shoulder and began to vigorously spank him until my hand was red and stinging. I couldn't stop—until I got another look at his eyes.

He had stopped crying, his fright overcoming his need to express his emotions. But his eyes were wide open, as big as I'd ever seen them. And absolutely, unequivocally horrified. That look stopped me.

The familiar feeling of weightlessness overtook me again. I knew Jeffrey's look. I knew that feeling.

It had been a common part of my childhood—enduring rages that began and ended just as unpredictably. The reality slowly sunk in. I had beaten my child. Just as my father had beaten his. Just as I swore I never ever would. A wave of nausea rose within me. *I was just like my father.* Even my children would be better off without me. There was no longer any reason to stay alive.

Suddenly I felt a great sense of calm. I knew what I needed to do. I was going to die. Yet somewhere within me a shred of self-preservation insisted I give myself one more chance. Fully “floating” by now, I calmly gathered the children as if I were someone else, asking them to play in the yard. I had a phone call to make. I was a death-row prisoner awaiting execution at my own hands, making one final attempt for a reprieve—one I was not altogether sure I wanted.

I didn't call Tim. Lord knows I'd done enough to Tim. Instead, I called a church-sponsored family crisis hotline. I stayed on the phone for over an hour and a half. I spilled out a wild flood of self-hatred, punctuated by moments when I would interrupt the conversation to check on the children.

I'm horrible, I told the man on the other end of the phone. I hate myself. I'm crazy. It would really surprise him that once upon a time I used to be somebody. I used to accomplish things. People who knew me, I told him, wouldn't believe that all of this was going on. It was probably hard to believe, but they think I'm a nice person. *They don't know me.*

The man, however, was not about to let me off the line. Again and again he tried to get my name and phone number. But I refused. I didn't want him to stop me from my destiny.

But finally, thoroughly exhausted, I relented and gave him my name and number. As I suspected, he said he was going to call an ambulance to come get me. I couldn't imagine it—the sirens going and everyone on the block coming to see what was going on with their crazy neighbor. An ambulance simply wasn't an option.

What followed was a negotiation as the man sold me on the importance of not being alone right then. He insisted that if I couldn't come up with a better plan, he was going to call 9-1-1 within the next five minutes. I ultimately agreed to call a teenager to watch the kids, and I agreed to see the pastor of my church. He was vigilant; if I hung up the phone, or if my pastor reported I had not arrived, he would call the police and an ambulance.

By then, however, it didn't make a difference. I was resigned to go ahead with the meeting as promised, to give life one more chance—albeit a temporary one.

I mechanically picked up my Walkman, kissed the children good-bye, and walked to the church rectory—stopping for a Big Gulp and a carton of cigarettes along the way. Why a carton and not a pack? Perhaps I knew where I was destined to go.

Without much effort, the pastor persuaded me to let him take me to the emergency room. Numb by then, I acquiesced.

Never once in this whole surreal episode did I call Tim, nor would I allow anyone else to do so on my behalf.

I'd agreed to their terms. They'd agree to mine.