

the Ocean Star journey

By Christina DiMari

A Fallen Star

The sound of the waves breaking onto shore grew louder as I rounded the bend leading to my safe harbor. I ran to the beach, first when I was seven, then a hundred more times after that. I had to run away, somewhere far away from the constant turmoil of my crazy family situation. My parents had a tumultuous relationship, fighting with each other and using their children as pawns in their battles. I was caught in the middle between a mother who didn't want her children and a violent alcoholic, bi-polar father.

I retreated to the beach where the soothing sound of the waves and ocean breeze helped clear my mind. While snuggled up in a tiny alcove that had been carved out of the cliff by the strong winds, I often gazed up into the nighttime sky.

I dreamt that God lived among the stars so clearly visible from my hiding place and I thought to myself, "I want to fly beyond the distant stars to where He lives."

Occasionally, my dad went with me hoping the ocean would bring peace to his troubled soul. One day as my dad and I walked the shoreline at sunset and the stars were beginning to appear in the nighttime sky, he looked up at the stars as he told me this story.

"A long time ago the nighttime sky was filled with bright, shining stars. All we had to do was look up to their light to help us find our way. There were so many stars to look up to that no one ever got lost. Then one day, some of the stars forgot how to shine for each other.

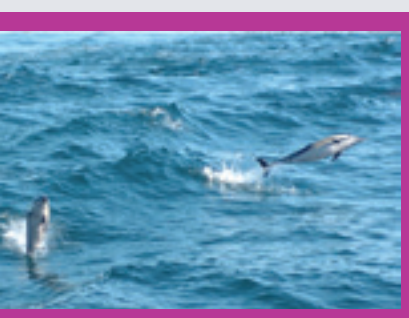
"One by one, many of them broke and fell from the sky. They landed in the sea. Some people call them starfish, but they're really ocean stars. They're on a journey to learn how to get put back together again. Once they do, they turn back into a star, shining for others the way they were meant to."

Then he turned and looked into my eyes, "So, if you ever find an ocean star, make sure to be kind and gentle. It's trying to find its way home."

I looked up at my dad as he ran his hands through his dark brown hair, and realized he felt the same way I did, like a broken star that lost its light. From that point on I realized that my parents didn't have any light to give me and I'd have to go on my own journey of discovery to find wholeness and light somewhere else.

A Dolphin Pod and Friendships

During this season of my life I spent all my time hanging out with my friends at the beach.



Katie and Elena caught up with me to watch the sunset as we often did. As the sun was about to drop below the horizon, we stood at the water's edge and let the rising tide wash over our bare feet. We all were facing difficult transitions in our lives and had little support other than the bond of friendship that helped us hold our heads high.

Elena interrupted our contemplation. "Look! There's a dolphin pod in the roll wave down shore!"

We ran down the beach until we could see them clearly.

"Wow! I've never seen a dolphin pod in real life!" Katie exclaimed.

"Me neither," I admitted.

We stood side by side and relished the joy of watching the pod effortlessly surf the roll wave. Elena broke into a wolf howl, hoping to connect with the dialect of the dolphins. We all bent over laughing. Then we listened.

There was magic in the air. Something we'd never experienced was happening between the dolphin pod and us. The quieter we became, the more we felt it. The dolphins knew something that we needed to know. I wanted to know what it was.

Beyond the expanse of what I knew my world to be, I looked at the dolphin pod and saw its symbol of hope.

"That's it!" I exclaimed. "We'll be like a dolphin pod. We'll travel together like they do. And we can protect each other from all the sharks that want to tear us apart."

It was clear that my friends understood what I had seen in the dolphins.

"I read that when one dolphin in a pod is injured, two healthy dolphins immediately come to help. They swim under the dolphin in trouble and support her with their flippers. Then they bring the dolphin to the surface so she can catch her breath," Katie added excitedly. "They help each other when times are tough."

"It's like they have a strong connection with each other," Elena said. "They know how to be friends—just like we do."

"Yeah, they don't leave each other when the going gets tough," I said. "Instead, they show up for each other."



Look Up to a Hope and a Future

Although my friends and I continued to hang out at the beach, I spent my teen years spiraling into self-destructive behavior, wandering from one seemingly thrilling adventure to another. Drugs numbed the parts of my life I didn't know what to do with and on-the-edge experiences in the beach culture provided an exciting reason for living. Then, within months of each other my family drama was off the charts out of control, my friend Rosie committed suicide, another died of cancer, my dog got run over by a car, and I was kicked out of high school three months before graduation.

Feeling the darkness closing in around me, I drove to the beach to surf and watch the sunset. As always, the water had a way of calming me and helping me feel like everything was going to be okay. At sunset, I sat alone at the water's edge watching the horizon until the last traces of daylight had drained away.

The clear blue sky formed a crisp backdrop as the huge orange ball ever so gently touched the surface of the ocean far in the distance. I closed my eyes and prayed, "God if You are real, will You please help me."

Calming words of hope found their way deep into my heart: Don't focus on the darkness of the disappearing sun. Look up at the color I can paint with your life.

As I lifted my head, I noticed the sun had painted a kaleidoscope of color across the sky. Shades of bright orange, pink, and purple filled the heavens as if an artist had painted a brilliant masterpiece there. The deeper the sun slipped below the water, the brighter the colors glowed in the sky above.

I made a promise this night that I would never forget. If I ever figure out how to put the broken pieces of my star back together again, I will be a light that shines for others.

The Bright Morning Star

From that point on, the words I heard in my heart threw a beam of light on my darkened path and little by little, things started getting better. My high school counselor asked me to meet with her and helped me see that although I couldn't change my family situation and I certainly could not change other people, I could change myself. I agreed to cooperate with her. After securing my diploma I kept my end of the bargain, which was to enroll in college.

Within the first few weeks, I met a girl who invited me to go to church with her the following Sunday. The pastor started the sermon talking about the stars and I hung on his every word.

"God has not forgotten you," he said. "Have you ever looked up in the nighttime sky and wondered if God thinks about you? He knows each of the stars in the sky and knows them each by name. That's how He looks at you. He knows you. He knows your name. He wants you to know Him too. That's why He sent His son, Jesus, The Bright Morning Star, to give His life, so that you can find your way home to being a child of God."

As I thought about all I was hearing, the symbols from the ocean that had been meaningful to me throughout my entire life began to take on deeper meaning. I had learned that when an ocean star is washed up on shore, it hardens and dies. But, if it is connected to its life source, the ocean, it becomes moldable and alive. It also didn't matter if the ocean star was broken or bruised or had pieces completely cut off, as long as it got back to the water, it would slowly regenerate and become whole.

God began to show me that He would be my Source of Life and Light. When I let the Living Water of His Words flow through me, little by little I began to heal. He did not design me to be broken, He designed me to shine, and the light that I would shine would be what I allowed Him to do with the broken pieces of my life.

Also, at the bottom of each ray of the starfish there is a tiny "orange eyespot." They cannot see, instead they move according to their keen sense of light and dark. I found peace knowing that He has a plan for my life and all I had to do was be "in tune to the Spirit" to know which way to go. I learned to trust He would guide me as He says in Psalm 32:8, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go, I will counsel you and watch over you."

Then a surfer friend of mine told me when huge waves break, the force of the water sweeps along the bottom of the ocean floor and picks up the ocean stars, threatening to toss them up on shore to die.

The ones that survive the pounding waves and don't get washed up on shore are the ones that attach themselves to a rock and hold on tight. As I continued my journey, I experienced many times when the waves loomed high above me, threatening to crash upon me and toss me up on shore to loose hope and purpose and meaning in life. But, I have learned that Jesus is a Rock that I can cling to and with His help I can get through anything I will ever have to face on this earth.

Pearls for the Journey

Years later, after I got married and had two amazing sons, I found myself right in the middle of living out my dream of creating the kind of family I hoped to have one day. Everything should have been fine, but I began to feel this empty feeling that wouldn't go away, like a shadow I couldn't outrun.

It took some time for me to figure out this feeling was coming from not having a mother relationship in my own life. I wished I had someone down here on earth to talk with. Someone I could relate to, like an older friend.

The more I talked to one of my friends about it the more I realized what I felt like. It was like I missed getting my pearls. Over the years I had watched my girl friends get advice and support from their moms, and eventually I watched many of them get a genuine strand of pearls for their graduation or wedding.

My friend, Anna, explained to me how a pearl is formed. She told me when a simple grain of sand enters into the living membrane of an oyster it causes the oyster fits of irritation. The oyster's reaction is to continually coat it and over time, the grain of sand eventually turns into a pearl. The Latin word for pearl literally means 'unique', attesting to the fact that no two pearls are identical. *Anna described how we are like the grain of sand when we come to God. He takes us as we are and even through the irritations we encounter on our journey He coats us with His grace, refines us and molds us into something of beauty that reflects His love to the world.*

I started thinking; maybe it's not so much about what I missed, but who I am and what I have of value to offer others that is important.

Another friend knew what I was feeling and came across this story she was eager to share with me. A little girl had dime-store pearls she cherished more than anything else. One day her father asked her to give him the pearls. Over and over again she said, "No, you can take anything but the pearls." All along the girl's father had a beautiful strand of genuine pearls in his pocket to give her in exchange for her dime-store set. The moral of the story is that when we are asked to surrender something, it often is because God has plans to replace it with something much better.

Immediately, I thought of the inexpensive, fake pearls my own grandmother had given me when I was just a small child. So I wrapped my dime-store pearls in a golden box with a pink bow, as an expression of surrendering what was bothering me about what I had missed out on.

In the following days I kept my eyes open to those around me whom I could learn from, and I continued to explore how God could provide what I was lacking by not having a mother and father in my life.

I came across this verse: *"The LORD God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly" (Psalm 84:11).*

I began to illustrate what this verse meant to me. I drew a sun, illustrated like a shining pearl, to become my symbol of how God would provide for me in motherly ways through His creation; a purple shield was my symbol of how God would provide for me in fatherly ways through the guidance of His Word. The symbols represent that I belong to Him, I was His child.

That's how we shine! When we allow God's blessing to be the center of our lives, our value and worth and ability to shine come from God making His home inside of us.

As I thought about the blessing and how to apply it to my life, I found myself remembering the first word I ever heard God speak to me. Believe.

Believe what His Word says is true. I am His child. I am one of a kind. He loves me. He meets me right where I am. His Word provides me with safe boundaries, clear direction, and a road map for successful living. He will never leave me nor forsake me. He is always with me. I can count on Him. He brings out the best in me.

Two years after I had surrendered my dime-store pearls, I opened the front door to go get the mail. It was a cold winter day as snowflakes formed a blanket of white on my front lawn. *Out of the corner of my eye I saw it. Leaning up against the side of my porch was a gift.* A gold box wrapped neatly with a pink bow, not unlike the box I had used to hold my dime-store pearls when I performed my little ritual of surrender.

I put the gift on my lap. Time seemed to stand still as I reached inside the box. First I opened the note. It was from someone I knew, but not real well. It was actually kind of random. It read, "I met this lovely girl selling beautiful items in a marketplace. She reminded me of you and I remembered you had a birthday at the end of the year. These are for you. Enjoy!"

I lifted out a small blue-satin pouch, unzipped the top, and pulled out the most beautiful, unique set of freshwater pearls I'd ever seen. Tears welled up in my eyes. No one knew about the fake pearls I surrendered, or that I put them in a gold box tied with a pink



the *Ocean Star* journey continued...

bow! Streams of tears began to flow down my face and onto the pearls I held in my hands. They were genuine. He was near.



I ran my fingers gently over each pearl, feeling its unique shape. Looking closer, I let out a shout. "There's a sun and a shield!" On the outside of the clasp was one solitary pearl shaped like the sun and one purple stone shaped like a shield, the exact symbols I had drawn in my art journal!

Then, in the deep places in my heart, I began to understand there was a lesson that came with my gift. These words encouraged me, but I also knew that I would share these words with other girls all over the world.

Each pearl on your strand represents someone who has been a Pearl to you in some way along your journey.

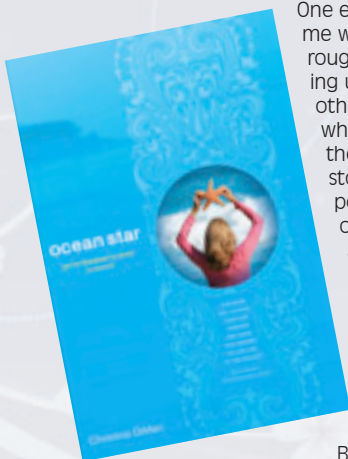
Because they crossed your path you have been encouraged to fly, pursue your dreams and reach your highest potential. They spoke words that brightened your path, walked with you awhile or cheered from afar. Authors motivated you, music moved you, and unexpected strangers inspired you. Think about the people who have added value to your life. These are your Pearls. When you put them on, you will carry the blessing they passed on to you.

Continue to look to me for all of your needs. I am your Sun, your Shield, and your Source of Life. By continually looking up, you have allowed Me to take the irritations of your life and mold you into a beautiful pearl. It is time now for you to take what you have learned and pass it on to girls coming up the road behind you.

Ocean Star Gifts

It all started one day while I was at the beach. A publisher asked me to write my memoir to encourage other girls. As my boys were surfing the waves in front of me, my editor called to tell me that although she loved all the life lessons I had woven throughout my memoir, I needed to tell her which one was the most important theme I wanted my readers to connect with. They would then go in that direction with the title of my book. I picked up a starfish I had in my beach bag and began to write words in the sand. SHINE, DREAM, BELIEVE, RIDE YOUR WAVE, FRIENDSHIP, MENTORS, HEALING, LOOK UP...

My words had become a magnet, drawing many on the beach to read what I was writing...



One elderly couple walked up to me and asked me what I was doing. I told them that I had a rough road for quite awhile when I was growing up and I wanted to do something to help other girls, so they would have someone who was willing to be a light for them. I told them I was in the process of writing my story, that I had a big dream to help empower girls all over the world to shine for other girls in their own communities.

While I was still rambling on, sharing all the dreams I had in my heart, the little old lady gently took my hands in hers and shared "Christina, you have a beautiful vision and I believe in you, that all the things you say are going to come true. These words you have written will speak life to all who receive them.

Before the waters come and embrace your words, take pictures of each one, then make some greeting cards out of your pictures and use the back of your card to share your dream." I looked down at the trail of words I had written

Painting by: Shannon McIntyre



and realized I knew what my next step would be. Then I looked back into the little old ladies eyes, but this time when I looked at her, all I could see was the beautiful pearl she wore around her neck. She said goodbye and before I could take in what had just happened, she was gone.

With A LOT of hard work and A LOT of prayer... my dreams took shape.

- ▶ **Ocean Star, my memoir was published** and read by thousands of girls all over the world.
- ▶ **I launched Ocean Star Gifts**, a greeting card and gift company, selling in every major beach community in the U.S. and now internationally. Portions of all proceeds helped me launch my main vision, which was to empower and encourage other girls to shine bright in their own communities.

You're Designed to Shine

As A.W. Tozer once said, "Though my fire is not large, it is real, and there may be those who can light their candle at its flame."

The vision started with one person speaking life into me. It has now spread to thousands and thousands of girls all over the world, speaking life into the girls in their own communities.

After writing a six-session life coaching study called, *You're Designed to Shine*, I began to gather girls in beach communities all over the world and encourage them on their journeys. During one of these events, I looked at the girls all spread out along the edge of the ocean as they were using a starfish we gave them to write their dreams in the sand.

I was smiling to myself thinking how much I love seeing girls get excited about their lives, go after their dreams and be all that they can be. There were so many girls that needed to be encouraged. That's when it hit me. ANYONE can do what I was doing! I then wrote a Leaders Guide that easily walks girls ages 8-88 through the steps to gather their own group of girls



“I wrote my memoir to encourage others to believe there is a special plan for their life, to never forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith, to pursue the gifts God has given them and to pass on those blessings to others. We each have a destiny to be discovered, a light that is meant to shine and a journey before us yet to be explored. I hope my readers will Look Up to the possibilities in their future and discover Pearls for the Journey from unexpected people and places along the way. And ultimately, like the Ocean Star, when we are connected to God as our Source of Life, no matter what gets broken along our journey, we will be made whole.”

Photos by: Claire Troesh, Nic McLean, Jake Davis

in their own communities and lead them through the six chapters. This can be done as a one-day event, a weekend retreat or once a week for six weeks.

All six lessons are drawn from meaningful life lessons I shared in writing my memoir, *Ocean Star*. But now it is time for the girls to take a look at their own story.

- ▶ Explore the Dreams you have for your life
- ▶ Discover the unique way your Star shines
- ▶ Travel with a supportive Pod of Friends
- ▶ Uncover Pearls for your Journey from mentors along the way
- ▶ Creating new life by surrendering the old things that drag you down
- ▶ Ride the Wave of God’s dream for your life by using your gifts to shine bright for others!

GIRLS SHINING BRIGHT ALL OVER THE WORLD!

The premise is basically simple: Pass it on! If you have been blessed, take some time to be a blessing to others. If someone has spoken life into you, take some time to speak life into other girls. Each girl who goes through *You’re Designed to Shine* then helps another girl go through it. This is by far the most exciting time of the dream landing. Girls and women of all

ages are gathering groups of girls all over the world!

HOW YOU CAN BE INVOLVED

SHINE! Realize no matter how young or old you are, you can be a pearl for other girls and make a lasting difference in their lives. Consider purchasing a set of *You’re Designed to Shine* to view and see if this is something that you would like to either do on your own, and hopefully, lead other girls through.

Purchase on our website at www.oceanstargifts.com

Much Amore’

Christina DiMari



SPECIAL OFFER for WSSM READERS!

Receive \$25 in free surf greeting cards when you purchase *Ocean Star* in our online store! In the subject line at checkout, write “WSSM SPR-SMR DEAL”

