



Christina McDowell on her life 'After Perfect'

"For me, it was about healing," Christina McDowell says on sharing her extremely personal story. / ELISABETH CAREN

Memoir. She exposes the side of "Wolf of Wall Street" we didn't get to see.

Growing up in an affluent Washington, D.C., suburb, Christina McDowell (née Christina Prousalis) had a picture-perfect life. But when she was 18, everything came crashing down when her father, Tom Prousalis, was arrested for fraud in connection with the conviction of Jordan Belfort, who was character-

ized in "The Wolf of Wall Street." McDowell's father went to prison and her family lost everything. She opens up to us about her decision to tell the story from her point of view in her new memoir, "After Perfect."

Was it a difficult decision to be so open?

I started writing my story many, many years ago as a way to process everything that was happening, but I fictionalized it because it was too painful to write any other way. ... I started collecting letters, emails and everything

from that time in my life and it slowly turned into a memoir. For me, it was about healing. It created a pathway to the truth and I learned more about myself than I think I ever

intended to.

Learning of your father's crime must have been really confusing for you because you grew up idolizing him quite a bit.

Oh, of course. I think every child can relate to this idea of putting your parents up on a pedestal. I had a really hard time when it happened. It happened when I was 18. At that age, legally you're an adult, but you're not really prepared for the real world.

You're really active

with InsideOut Writers, a nonprofit for incarcerated youth. Do you think your past influenced your decision to work with them?

Absolutely. I relate to them because of my own feeling of abandonment, struggle to survive and being touched by the criminal justice system.

Writing is what healed you, so now you're helping them heal in the same way.

Exactly. Writing is so healing and we use it as a way to transform ourselves. We have the

best time.

What is your viewpoint on money and wealth now?

I don't think there's anything wrong with having money or seeking to live a big life, but I do believe in ethical and moral boundaries with money. When you cross an ethical and moral line, that's where greed comes in and I certainly don't believe in living a greedy life.



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