

Doubting is difficult, but the real threat to faith is doubting alone. Christin Taylor's new book, *Crew*, offers a surprisingly radical, practical, and countercultural call to Christian hospitality in a world stuck in isolation. For those with upturned lives or overturned dreams, it is a guide back into what you were striving for all along, had you known: authentic Christian community.

—DAVID DRURY, chief of staff of The Wesleyan Church; author and coauthor of half a dozen books, including *Being Dad* and *SoulShift*

If this book is about finding one's crew, then I want Christin Taylor in my boat. Her words, anecdotes, and research are a map through the choppy waters of guiding others—and ourselves—through life's transitions. Taylor draws readers in, not with simplistic solutions, but rather by offering vivid stories of transformation. She demonstrates that healing can only come when one fully embraces his or her own journey partnered with community. This book is a treasure and tool for young adults, parents, pastors, and mentors seeking wisdom on how to navigate the inevitable shifts life presents.

—KRISTIN RITZAU, author of *A Beautiful Mess*, adjunct faculty member at Azusa Pacific University

Christin Taylor weaves a powerful tapestry of the challenges of young adulthood. More importantly, she brings to life the concepts of learning partnerships and good company for young adults' developmental journeys. Authentically sharing her own experiences and deepest thoughts and emotions, she portrays the nature of good company in ways readers can see in their own lives. She balances a deep sensitivity to adults'—particularly parents'—struggles to offer the space for younger adults to grow and the imperative that the space is essential. She not only offers a rich description of the good company she advocates; she embodies the principles of good company in her writing. This book will be good company for young adults who are making their way into adulthood as well as those who are trying to accompany them.

—MARCIA BAXTER MAGOLDA, author of *Authoring Your Life*

Finding your way in a sea of opposition can be one of the greatest struggles encountered in life. In *Crew*, Christin Taylor guides readers through the process of overcoming the hurdles and challenges that exist on this journey. Filled with vulnerable stories of how she overcame these same struggles, Taylor shares a simple yet effective approach to opening our lives, and the freedom that comes in trusting in community. If you've ever felt misguided, alone, or afraid of how to go on, this is the book for you.

—JEREMY SUMMERS, coauthor of *Awakening Grace*,  
director of spiritual formation for The Wesleyan Church

Christin Taylor is one of those rare writers able to draw insight and wisdom from her own experience, and to communicate life lessons through riveting personal narrative. Her language is direct, uncluttered, mercifully free of cleverness, and entirely fresh. If you are looking for genuine inspiration, presented in a wonderfully humble voice, then this is the book, which is about thriving in that face of adversity, is for you. Taylor *listens* as she speaks, a skill that allows a higher voice to flow into her writing.

—DUSTIN BEALL SMITH, author of  
*Key Grip: A Memoir of Endless Consequences*

# **CREW**

**FINDING COMMUNITY  
WHEN YOUR DREAMS CRASH**

CHRISTIN N. TAYLOR



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Dedicated to Ashley Hill, Emily Anne Geddes,  
Molly Chrisman, and Jaqi Schaeffer

We are only fellow travelers—at different places on the road,  
perhaps, but fallible and ordinary nonetheless.

—MARGARET GUENTHER

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Finally, to all the young adults at Western Washington University, who have trusted me with their stories and let me join them for parts of their journey. You all have inspired me, and taught me what it means to be good company.



## Introduction

# THE LONG ROAD TO BELLINGHAM

The long arm of dawn curled somewhere behind the horizon, not yet ready to touch the morning pink. I stood on the sidewalk wrapped in a quiet I seldom heard in Los Angeles. Everyone was in bed by now. At 3:30 a.m., even the partiers, divas, musicians, artisans, and bohemians were unwinding into sleep. Over me the silhouette of a lone palm tree arched against the slate sky. Dwayne pushed another suitcase into the corner of the back seat, the dome lights muted by the piles of boxes and bags already filling every blank space.

“Are we ready to get Noelle?” I asked, my voice hushed into the creases of that strange hour—not quite night and not quite

morning. Even though Dwayne and I had been up since midnight going over every last detail of our long move up the coast, my body jumped with adrenaline. Just three hours before, I folded my outfit for the first day on the road into a neat pile beside the suitcases. Dwayne and I rehearsed the order in which we would do everything the next morning, keeping our voices low so as not to wake my cousins in the next room. We would get up, dress, put the bags in the car, then, finally, get the most precious cargo of all: lift Noelle carefully out of her Pak 'n Play, and tuck her into the car seat as seamlessly as possible so as not to wake her.

We were leaving at 3:30 in the morning because it would take twelve hours to drive up the spine of California. This was just the first of a three-day journey from Southern California to Bellingham, Washington, the last big city before the Canadian border. Some friends of ours, who have three kids of their own, advised us to leave early in the morning, while Noelle was still asleep. “That way, she’ll sleep for the first three hours of the trip,” my friend said.

Dwayne looked around the empty driveway of my cousin’s house. Our eyes met for a moment in the hush of that in-between hour, and he nodded.

Inside the house, every room was still. I padded my way back down the hallway to the guest room where Dwayne and I had

stayed the first night we moved to L.A., seven years earlier. So much had changed since then.

I pushed open the door to see the shadow of the Pak 'n Play wedged up to the foot of our bed. Seven years ago, Dwayne and I slept in that bed as a newly married couple, just twenty-one and twenty-two. Now here we were with a two-year-old, making another cross-country move. Only this time we weren't leaving the home our parents had built for us, we were leaving the home we had built for ourselves.

I slid my hands as smoothly as possible beneath the warm lump of my daughter's body and lifted. I touched her gently to my shoulder, trying to glide over the carpet, but in three steps, she was awake. She blinked and lifted her warm cheek off my shoulder, immediately alert.

I buckled her into the car seat, reassuring myself that she would fall asleep once we started driving. This was going to be one long ride if we had to keep her entertained from the dark hours of the morning to the rosy hours of evening.

"Is that everything?" Dwayne asked as we buckled ourselves in. I looked out the window at my cousin's house. They had let us stay with them for our last night in L.A., since the majority of our belongings were purged, sold, and given away. What was left had been puzzled inside our U-haul trailer.

I took a deep breath and turned back toward him. “That’s everything.” Taking each other’s hands, we pulled out into that gray hour, saying good-bye to our friends, our family, our city, and our twenties.

Los Angeles was not just the city where we lived after graduating from college; it was the city where we shipwrecked. It was the city where we crashed into the waves of adulthood, shattered like debris, and gradually floated onto the golden sands of home. As we hauled our trailer up the Grapevine, I looked back at the grand basin where my life had pooled and reshaped over the last seven years.

Sharon Daloz Parks says in her book *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams* that most everyone hits a metaphorical shipwreck in their twenties.<sup>1</sup> This is an event, big or small, subtle or not, that rips apart the very fabric of our identity. Shipwreck can be triggered by any number of things. It can happen because we don’t get the job we want, a significant relationship falls apart, we experience physical illness or injury, or we discover an intellectual construct no longer works for us. Regardless of the cause of shipwreck, the result is the same: calling into question everything we think we know about ourselves, the world, and God. It threatens us in a total and primal way.

Dwayne and I had both experienced our shipwrecks in L.A. Mine had to do with working in the film industry: a career that

shattered me and forced me to look deep inside my own motivations, my own sense of self. I was a shadow of a girl living to prove herself to the world through what I perceived as success and mission. What I learned instead was that I would always be a shadow of a girl if any part of my identity and future was built by my own hands. Instead, I learned to trust a God whom C. S. Lewis described, via his picture of Aslan, as wild but good—a God I could not pin down, could not predict, but was forced nonetheless to trust despite the wreck he led me into.<sup>2</sup> In the end, I found a future—an identity fuller, richer, deeper, and more authentic than any I could have bought, borrowed, or scraped together on my own.

All of this coming apart and pulling back together again happened in the hands of some very wise and beautiful people. I felt the air leave my lungs every time I imagined leaving them behind in the sun and grit of L.A.—Erika, Drew, Melissa, Lynn, David, Jeff, Amy, Teresa, Kristin. The names trotted out from my heart like streamers chasing our car north. How would I find my way forward without these people in my life anymore? I watched as the hills swallowed them up, tucking them behind peak after peak.

In her book *Authoring Your Life*, Marcia Baxter Magolda writes that when we move from adolescence to young adulthood, a shift happens in the hierarchies of our life.<sup>3</sup> Whereas our parents,

teachers, and coaches once sat on the front of the tandem bike leading our way, guiding us through tough decisions, now, the steering is up to us. They must get off the bike and take their seats behind us. We move forward and take the handlebars. We still need them in our lives, but we need them in a separate faculty other than authority. Baxter Magolda calls this being good company—a theory that has been adopted by universities across the country as they seek to educate their students both in- and outside the classroom.

Indeed, when I was living in L.A., clawing my way through some of the darkest days of my life, it was Erika, Drew, Jeff, Amy, and all the names I listed above who had sat on the back of my bike and given me forward momentum, all the while allowing me to learn who I was and how to be an adult.

We were moving to Bellingham now, because Dwayne took a position as a resident director at Western Washington University. I was just thirty years old, he was twenty-nine, both on the cusp of a new decade of our lives. We were turning toward a new, more committed phase of life. Dwayne had finally found a career he loved in student affairs, I was teaching and writing, and we were planning on expanding our family soon.

In so many ways, my shipwreck felt behind me, though its ripples were still present in my life. In so many ways, I felt like



an adult, as if we were finally starting life, the chaos and scramble and transition of young adulthood behind us. It was time for us to invest in our family and our careers, which were both dedicated to working with college students and young adults. It was time for us to move from being young adults ourselves in need of good company, to thirtysomethings offering good company to the young adults in our backyard.

I mean “backyard” almost literally. As a resident director, Dwayne was provided a two-bedroom apartment on the second floor of Edens Hall, a grand building perched on the side of an arboretum and facing out toward the Puget Sound. Below our window, the rest of the campus of Western Washington University unfurled into the downtown of Bellingham, which likewise unfurled into the bay. The students lived above and all around us. They paced back and forth outside our door. We rode the elevator with them, ate dinners in the dining hall with them, and took long walks in the evening all around campus with Noelle speeding away on her little trike hollering at all the students she knew.

Everything I’ve learned about being good company started during our two years in Bellingham. I watched as Dwayne and his staff implemented the learning theories of Marcia Baxter Magolda. I read and researched young adult identity development theories as I wrote my first book. Most importantly,

I hosted a steady stream of twentysomethings and college students in our apartment. I cooked dinner for them. We played games and knitted and crocheted together. We watched movies and had coffee together. But mostly we sat into the late hours of the night talking about life and the future.

As I write this book about being and finding good company, it's hard for me not to return to Western Washington University and the staff and students we met there over and over again in my mind. Story after story blooms from the page, based on the lives of these people, the insights, the education. The truth is that WWU does extraordinarily well at providing good company to its students. Their entire residential education model was based on Marcia Baxter Magolda's theory of self-authorship and the steps she proposes for walking with young adults through major transitions.

As you read this book, you'll meet many students and staff members from Western, the fertile ground where I learned most about how to be good company. We may not all be so lucky to work or live at an institution that has so methodically and carefully cultivated an environment of good partnership and has watched its students and employees flourish in response. And so, in this book, I hope to share with you just a little of what I learned there and pass along the goodness.