

DEALING  
with the  
CrazyMakers  
in YOUR  
LIFE

Dr. David Hawkins



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This book contains stories in which the author has changed people's names and some details of their situations to protect their privacy.

## **DEALING WITH THE CRAZymAKERS IN YOUR LIFE**

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1

# It's a Crazy-Making World

*If despair comes to our own small lives,  
so comes the avenue for allowing it  
to deepen and change us.*

CHRISTINA BALDWIN

Do you ever feel as if you're going crazy, wondering if the problem is with you or the people around you? Have you been in a conversation where your head starts swimming and you forget the topic of the conversation? Has someone close to you told you what you were feeling or perhaps even what you were thinking? Or have you been involved in a conversation, suddenly realizing you weren't following at all? Do you ever feel drawn into a conversation you didn't want to have in the first place?

For most of us, certain situations make us feel uncomfortable, and we wonder what is going on. Some people in our lives, often close family members, make us tense, on edge, irritable. Are we nuts? Are they nuts? Leaving our personal world, we've entered into the spinning world of the crazy-maker.

We all know crazy-makers, and even though we may feel ill-equipped to interact with them, we can develop some skills that will help us remain healthy while relating with them more effectively.

Just last week I saw three different people who were struggling with crazy-making people in their lives.

Sarah was first. She arrived noticeably agitated, fidgeting with the buttons on her blouse. She blurted, “I can’t handle gardens with too much color. It’s sensory overload. It reminds me of my family—random and out of control. I like gardens made of white flowers—they soothe me.”

Sarah was 25 and single, taking drama classes at the local community college. She had come to see me for symptoms of depression. She appeared too thin for her modest frame, as if a strong wind might whisk her off her feet.

“Tell me more about your family,” I said.

“They make me crazy,” she said, waving her hands in the air. “I don’t know why or even how. That’s why I’m here. I’ve got to figure it out because they make me nuts, and I hate it.”

“Be more specific, Sarah. Describe a family setting and what happens to you when you’re in it.”

“Okay, take this past weekend. First of all, it was chaotic. I stopped by to see my mom and stepdad. Everyone was talking at once. My sister was there too, and she always drives me nuts. My mom makes me feel crazy a minute after we’re together, so the two of them at once feels like a zoo.”

“What do they do to make you feel crazy?”

“My sister makes me feel crazy because everything has to be about her. She’s a crisis queen. You know the kind—her life is always in an uproar. She’s fighting with her boyfriend, who’s a loser on drugs, and she wants to borrow more money from my parents. It’s always about her. Heaven forbid that I have something going on in my life. She could never stand to give up the spotlight long enough for me to have any problems.”

“What’s her name?”

“My sister? Her name is Dena—but I call her Drama.”

Sarah paused as though searching her files for additional evidence.

“Then there’s my mom. She’s on her fourth marriage. She can’t seem to hang onto a man. She changes men like she changes outfits. And she does that a lot too, by the way. What she spends on clothes could feed a small country.”

“What does she do that drives you crazy?”

“She and my sister always seem to compete to see who gets the most attention. Every time I share something, they’ve already been there, done that, and have the T-shirt.”

“So what happened this past weekend?”

“Well, I wanted to talk about my drama class and my disappointment at not getting the part I wanted. Mom said Dena would have gotten the part and started talking about all the lead roles she played in high school. She did it to me again! Nothing I do is right or good enough. Mom never dreams big for me. Her life has been one disappointment after another, but she’d never admit it. I don’t think she wants me to succeed. And it makes me mad.”

“Parents ought to let their kids know it’s okay to shoot for the stars.”

Sarah shrugged her shoulders and laughed sardonically.

“What do you do if your parents can’t dream big with you? Or what if they don’t really listen to you or care how you feel about something disappointing in your life?”

“That’s a shame,” I said. “Parents who don’t really listen to us cause us pain. We feel hurt and have to do some grieving as we get older. Sarah, you’ll need to find a way to cheer yourself on if your parents can’t.”

“One of the crazy things is that I keep thinking she’ll be able to cheer me on one of these days. But that day never comes. I always hope it will be different, but I end up leaving her house feeling disappointed. I feel punched in the gut every time I visit. Maybe I set myself up.”

“Maybe so,” I said. “Something inside all of us wants to be praised

and encouraged by our parents. When they don't do it, we feel cheated. And we feel a little crazy."

A few hours later, I met with Becky. Though not related to Sarah, she could have been. Her story reflected similar problems with crazy-making.

Becky also suffered from depression, a common plight for those who were raised in or are now living in crazy-making environments. Although Becky had not grown up in a crazy-making home, she was living in a crazy-making marriage. She was a frazzled wife of 20 years and mother of two. She was 50 pounds overweight. Dressed in jeans and sweatshirt, she looked a good 10 years older than her 43 years. Her clothes were wrinkled and mismatched, as though she had picked out the first things she could find in the laundry basket.

"I'm a Christian," Becky had announced during one of her earlier sessions, "so I have to live with my choices. I don't really love my husband, but I can't change that. Who could love someone like him?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Jeff's a perfectionist. He's about as much fun as a pencil salesman."

I smiled at Becky's comment.

"Becky, I'll assume that Jeff isn't really a pencil salesman. So what did you mean by your comment?"

"Jeff's about as colorless as a piece of typing paper. He's an engineer. He thinks like an engineer. I used to be an artist, but he's sucked that right out of me. I haven't created anything in years."

"How does he do that? Or how do you let him do that?"

"It's not hard. He criticizes everything I do. I share my dreams, and he shoots them down. I try to design something, working in my art studio, and he thinks I should get a full-time job. He says I'm dreaming. I think in possibilities. He gives me 20 reasons why my dream can't possibly come true. So guess what? After a while, I learned to keep my thoughts to myself—I feel like I'm going crazy."

"You must have loved Jeff at one time," I said.

"You know what? I don't really think I did. I think he was attracted to me when I was a wiry, dreamy college girl. I saw a practical man

who would take care of me the rest of my life. And he's done an okay job of it, except for my emotional and spiritual growth."

"Tell me about your spiritual growth."

"Jeff is a Christian, but things are black-and-white for him. If I want to explore a new way to pray, he thinks I'm going New Age. If I want to explore different kinds of worship from what he's used to, he thinks I'm flipping out. It's his way or no way."

"And so you learned to shut down?" I asked.

"Yes, and it's killing me," Becky continued. "I can't do it anymore. I don't know what the answer is, but I can't keep living my life to please Jeff. It's just not working. It's driving me crazy."

"Why do you think it is getting to you now?" I asked.

"We have two teenage daughters, and I can't stand that they're growing up thinking that the life Jeff and I have is normal. It's not. I believe in keeping the family together for the kids and all, but this is nuts. I can't keep putting on an act for our girls. I want to teach them to live authentically, but I'm not sure how to do it."

"I have two sons of my own, Becky. I'd like them to see the world through their eyes, not just the way I see it. I can see that you want your daughters to be individuals."

"All I know," she said, "is that I can't live like this anymore."

"Maybe it's time to take back some of the power you've given away to Jeff. You seem to have given up your artistic pursuits because of him. Maybe it's time to regain some of your individuality."

"Of course you're right," she said firmly. "But standing up to his criticism is easier said than done."

The following day I met with Tim. At 15 he was filled with the usual angst one might expect to find in an adolescent. Tim, however, was not simply struggling with teenage issues of identity. Like Sarah and Becky, he was trying to deal with a crazy-making family.

Tim was the oldest of four children. His parents were very prominent in our community. His father was a highly respected doctor. Their home was in one of the nicest neighborhoods in our city, an area known as Pill Hill because of the number of physicians living there.



Tim's parents, John and Susan, brought him to see me several months ago after Tim had attempted suicide. Tim's aspirin overdose was not nearly lethal and was more embarrassing than anything to his parents. John was simply not going to permit mental health problems in his family. My marching orders were clear: Figure out why Tim would pull such a stunt.

Having told me point-blank that they expected Tim to snap out of it, I knew I had my work cut out for me, and I told them it wasn't going to be that simple.

I agreed to meet with Tim but made it clear that I would want to see the whole family fairly soon. The problem clearly went far beyond Tim's halfhearted attempt at an overdose. The problem was obviously the result of a dysfunctional family system.

Tim was incredibly bright. He had a quick, self-deprecating wit and refused to take his life or his family too seriously. He smirked when talking about how his father was the head of the local medical society and a member of several prestigious boards.

"Sometimes I feel like my dad wants me to call him Doctor just to confirm that he's really so mighty and important. He doesn't seem to understand that none of it means a thing to me. He's just a doctor. Not God."

Tim's anger oozed from him as soon as he plopped down in the chair in my office. He showed his disdain for his family's status in the community by wearing his long, brown hair pulled back in a ponytail, much to his parents' chagrin.

"So the suicide attempt..." I asked.

"It was nothing. Just me telling my parents I'm sick of living the way they expect me to live. Not going to do it anymore."

"Well, you sure got their attention," I said.

"I just want them to allow me to be me. That's all I want."

"And they won't let you?"

"Nope. They have a way of doing things, and that's the way it is. It's crazy. For example. My mom and dad belong to the elite church in town. Does that get them closer to God? My dad prays at all of our meals but never sits down and listens to what I think about God. He

doesn't care about what I think. My mom gives in to whatever my dad wants—she says that's the way God wants it. I don't see that in the Bible. A lot of things about the way they live just don't fit me.”

Tim was lanky and strong, yet he spurned athletics. He was friendly but not overly sociable. He found comfort in computers, and this too bothered his parents. His father had lettered in football at Yale and hoped his son would be athletically inclined as well. His father was a workaholic, and here too Tim was a disappointment. Grades and academic accomplishments meant little to him. Whatever his parents admired, Tim seemed to reject, and this caused incredible tension in their home.

While Tim's father made his mark in medicine, his mother made hers as a hypochondriac. The family's attention always seemed to be focused on his mother and her latest illness. Tim and his three siblings were raised primarily by the family nanny, whom Tim also resented.

Tim's antisocial difficulties seemed directly related to the family's dysfunction. His father's workaholic tendencies had created marital problems for years. No amount of his father's money could make his mother happy. She wanted love and affection, and these seemed impossible for his father to give her. She discovered the only way to get attention was to be ill.

Tim displayed an unusual amount of clarity about his family functioning.

“My mom is nuts,” he said. “If she's not sick with one thing, she's sick with another. I haven't seen her leave our home, except for church on Sundays, more than a couple of times in the past two years. Dad goes to his board meetings and comes home late. I wouldn't be surprised if he's having an affair.”

“Does that make you angry?” I asked.

“Maybe. Who wouldn't be mad about having a family like mine? Mom never spends time with us kids, and Dad's always working. I have a famous father, but who cares? It doesn't do us any good. We live in a big, fancy house and are expected to go to some Ivy League

university. But the bottom line is that we know our parents don't really care about us."

Tim's anger was eating him alive, but all he could see was his parents' problems. He could recognize their issues very clearly but had little insight as to how they were affecting him. Neither parent took the time or energy to champion him or his siblings. He was reeling from blatant rejection—from his father's workaholicism and his mother's desperate attempts to gain attention. His world was crazy.

### Different People, Same Problem

Becky is nearly 20 years older than Sarah. They come from very different backgrounds yet have similar symptoms. Tim is just a teenager. He has his life ahead of him, yet he too struggles in a world that doesn't make sense. All three suffer from crazy-making environments: Tim, from parents who are rejecting and passively controlling; Becky, from a demanding husband; Sarah, from a crisis-oriented sister and scene-stealing mother. Consider how their crazy-making worlds impact Tim, Sarah, and Becky.

- All struggle with symptoms of depression.
- All have low self-esteem.
- All feel deprived and unappreciated.
- All feel crazy and helpless, especially when trying to assert themselves.
- All are desperate to change their lives.

Things seem clear from the outside looking in. Because we recognize the madness, we want to reach in and yell, "Stop it! This is crazy!" But it's not that simple. Tim, Sarah, and Becky are trapped in a web of confusion they don't fully understand or feel capable of controlling.

Do any of these scenarios sound familiar? Your life is obviously unique to you, but are you experiencing the effects of living in a crazy-making world?

## Crazy-Makers

Tim, Sarah, and Becky have much to teach us. Each is enmeshed in a world of crazy-makers. None of them are truly living their own lives. Rather, their worlds are dictated, in large part, by people who have an inordinate amount of power to make them feel good or incredibly bad. People who manipulate their moods, their behaviors, and most importantly, their well-being.

A review of the lives of Tim, Sarah, and Becky reveals that all three have lost their identities. They are integrally involved with family members who are egocentric. In fact, this is a core factor of the crazy-making person—egocentricity. These people do not set out to manipulate and destroy another's world. Sadly, it comes naturally to them. They are rarely malicious—almost always they are acting out their own misery. Let's look a bit closer into their lives.

Sarah's sister and mother seek attention. This is one powerful form of crazy-making that we will talk about in more detail later in this book. We notice that Sarah calls her sister Drama, referring to her ability to instantly create chaos around her. This is one of the surest forms of crazy-making behaviors.

Becky was raised in a normal family yet fell victim to a crazy-making husband. She is married to a man who demands control, another sure sign of a crazy-maker. We see her world and identity continually shrinking as he tells her what to think and how to live. Her individuality gets lost in the process.

Finally, we witness Tim's mother, who is a hypochondriac. Her behavior shouts, "It's all about me and my illness!" Meanwhile, his father's workaholic lifestyle insists, "It's all about my busyness and my business." How does Tim stand a chance with parents who are so adept at wreaking havoc in their world?

We will explore many additional forms of crazy-making. But we won't stop there. Our goal is to examine solutions for taking power from the crazy-makers so that you can choose exactly how you will live.

No longer controlled by the crazy-makers, you will find a freedom you never knew existed.

## Definitions of Crazy-Making

We owe a debt to Julia Cameron, renowned author of *The Artist's Way*, for helping identify crazy-makers in our lives. As an artist striving to let her artistic voice come alive, she was surprised to find so many people who not only refused to champion her true self as an artist but actually went out of their way to limit her growth. She helps us recognize the people in our lives who do just what the title *crazy-makers* suggests—they drive us crazy.

Cameron says crazy-makers create storm centers. Chaos. Drama. She says they create confusion and then pretend they want to help solve the problem. She says, “Crazy-makers are small on responsibility and big on blame.”

I call them “energy suckers.” You know the kind—when you are around them you feel like your very breath is being stolen from you.

My wife, Christie, and I have a friend (we'll call her Debbie) who qualifies as a drama queen. She is sociable, vibrant, and interesting. We like her—in small doses. The problem is that Debbie likes to talk about herself, and she views everything from her unique vantage point.

Even if I had just won the Nobel Prize for literature or if Christie were being solicited by the White House for design consultation, we wouldn't be able to get a word in edgewise because when Debbie talks, it's all about her.

This may sound humorous, but it can be exhausting. With only so much air to go around, sooner or later we start gasping. Christie and I look at one another, smiling and wondering if Debbie will ever stop to take a breath. When we realize that the energy is being sucked out of the room, the situation is no longer amusing.

Kaleel Jamison, author of *The Nibble Theory and the Kernel of Power*, has a similar theory to Cameron's. Jamison says “nibblers” always want to be in the big circle, and they will do anything to make yours a smaller circle. Nibblers bite at you to keep you in your place. They want to convey the message that they are big and you are small.

If you feel smaller than someone in your life, perhaps that person is nibbling away at your self-esteem.

Sometimes crazy-makers are not so benign. We don't smile when we are around them because we recognize they are militant and malicious. If a good feeling is in the room, they take it upon themselves to destroy it.

Drs. Rick Brinkman and Rick Kirchner write in their book *Dealing with People You Can't Stand* that these people are "snipers" who use "grenades" to damage those around them. Brinkman and Kirchner believe the snipers first identify your weaknesses and then use them against you. They may resort to put-downs behind your back or insult you directly in front of a crowd. All the while they smile, acting as if they are armed only with squirt guns. What harm could they really cause?

## **Egocentrism**

Crazy-makers are, of course, not attacking us with squirt guns. Their weapons are loaded with lethal ammunition. Perhaps you are reading this book because someone in your life is using deadly force against you. Crazy-makers trumpet their innocence, but you know better. That swirl of dust around their feet didn't just appear out of nowhere—they created it. After reading this book, you will know even better how to disarm them and regain control of your life.

Crazy-makers are, above everything else, egocentric. They are frustrated with their lives, and as a result, they demand attention. Because they have not found a functional way to make their lives work, they become upset if they see your life going well. And if you have problems, they will readily zero in on them to further reduce your self-esteem. More than anything else, they want the world to revolve around them.

Aggressive people are angry at the world, hypochondriacs are extremely sad and lonely, and attention-seekers want to be surrounded by drama. All demand to be in the spotlight, and they are not willing to share it with anyone.

Most of us enjoy attention, but we understand that its usefulness

is limited. Egocentrism creates a very small world. A world of one. It is a lonely and unhappy place.

As we examine how to deal with the immature, self-absorbed, egocentric crazy-makers, we will learn just how tiny and forlorn their world is. We will even learn to have compassion for them as we discover how to deal more effectively with them.

## They Just Won't Listen

Perhaps you have attempted to get the crazy-maker in your life to change—with little success. Perhaps you have confronted her about her behavior—yet seen no change. Maybe you've demanded he see a therapist—and been met with staunch refusal. Join the ranks of those caught in the maelstrom of the crazy-makers.

One of the most important things you will learn in this book is that crazy-makers often do not see what they are doing. For all of the destruction they perpetrate on others, they generally do not sit awake at night thinking of ways to make our lives more difficult. They are not reading books titled *The Crazy-Makers Guide to the Galaxy* or *How to Make Those You Love Lose Their Mind*.

They act this way without fully intending to harm anyone. Scott Peck, in his book *The Road Less Traveled*, does an excellent job of describing two different kinds of people. The first—most likely folks like you and me who read or write these kinds of books—tend to be overly responsible. We take responsibility not only for ourselves but often for others as well. The second group consists of those who are “under-responsible.” They blame everyone else for their problems. Not only are they not responsible for your problems, they feel no responsibility for their own either. How crazy does that make you feel?

Crazy-makers have an uncanny way of escaping responsibility. They can dodge any bullet, all the while making you feel kind of nutty. *How did they do that?* you ask yourself after walking away feeling confused and ashamed. You thought for sure you had an airtight case, but they didn't hear a word of it. They didn't listen, and they certainly didn't absorb anything you had to say. This is because they

are defensive—closed to any new information. They have a rigid way of viewing you and themselves, and that's the way it is.

Crazy-makers create trouble for everyone around them. They are long on problems and short on solutions. They draw you into their dilemmas and can make your head swim in a nanosecond. They pit people against each other and are extremely manipulative. This makes them dangerous—and that's why this book is about learning how to deal effectively with that danger.

## No Cause for Surprise

In a world where people are often immature and shallow, lacking spiritual and emotional maturity, we shouldn't be surprised that crazy-makers have found a way to thrive. In fact, crazy-makers have been around forever. Listen to the words of the apostle Paul as he worked against the egocentric crazy-makers of his day:

It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains (Philippians 1:15-17).

The apostle James differentiated between two kinds of wisdom. He pointed out that we will always have crazy-makers among us because their actions are “earthly” and may even be satanic.

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice (James 3:14-16).

How often have you felt overwhelmed by people who were consumed by bitterness and envy? How about those who are enamored



with selfish ambition? Both lack the capacity to live outside themselves long enough to honor others. It's truly all about them, and we know it.

## A Way of Escape

Thankfully, we have a way to escape crazy-making—by following the way of Christ. Consider again the words of the apostle James:

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness (James 3:17).

We don't have to suffer along with crazy-makers. We don't have to get caught in their web of manipulation and deceit. There is a way to escape, and we will learn all about it in this book. We will explore the different lives of crazy-makers, what makes them tick, how we get hooked, and how to get unhooked.

If you have been manipulated by the manipulator—the one who uses manipulation to get what he wants—take heart. There is a pathway to freedom.

If you have been assaulted by the aggressor—the one who uses power and control to get you to conform to his wishes—take heart. You can regain control of your life. You can set boundaries that leave the blusterer blowing in the wind.

If you have been seduced by the sufferer—the one who can never seem to make her life work and wants you to fix her—take heart. You can learn to give back her problems and her responsibility for them. You can learn to establish healthier boundaries and set yourself free.

If you have been confounded by the camouflager—the one who disguises words and motives—take heart. You can learn how to avoid getting caught in her confusing words and mind games. You can learn to champion your own thinking, surrounding yourself with people who think and talk clearly.

In this book, you will learn about the tactics of the crazy-makers, and most importantly, you will learn how to take your life back. You will recognize what these crazy-makers are doing and what you can do in response. Ultimately, you can determine whether you'll need to end your relationship with the people who are driving you mad.

So join me as we create a plan to reclaim your freedom. It's your life, and you deserve to live it on your terms.