

A Joyful Heart

An Interview with Chrissy Metz



Chrissy Metz with her Joyful Heart wine

EDITORS' NOTE Emmy and two-time Golden Globe nominee Chrissy Metz starred on the award-winning NBC series *This Is Us*, winner of the 2018 and 2019 SAG Award for Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble in a Drama Series and People's Choice Award for "Favorite New TV Drama." Metz recently starred as Joyce Smith in the hit 20th Century Fox faith-based film, *BREAKTHROUGH*. She also performs "I'm Standing With You" on the *BREAKTHROUGH* soundtrack, written by 10-time Academy Award nominee Diane Warren. Metz performed this song at the 2019 ACM Awards. Metz guest-starred in the hit comedy series *The Last OG* with Tracy Morgan, and the NBC hit series *Superstore*. She is known for her roles in *American Horror Story: Freak Show*, *Sierra Burgess is a Loser*, *My Name is Earl*, and *Entourage*, to name a few. Metz released her memoir, *This Is Me*, which debuted at number one on *The New York Times Bestseller List*. People magazine named her to the "Ones to Watch" and "50 Most Beautiful."

You have been public about the challenges you faced in your childhood and early years. What made you feel it was important to discuss these experiences in public?

I think a lot of it has to do with being on the show, *This is Us*. I felt that every single time my character, Kate, would do something that made her more vulnerable in her relationship with her family and with her siblings, it always brought them closer together. It showed me that when you are vulnerable and honest, it allows others to feel and act the same way. It becomes a reciprocal relationship. While I always knew this, having the opportunity to play Kate allowed me to see the benefits firsthand and reconfirmed my belief that we are all more alike than we are different.

The more Kate went through on the show, the more people would talk to me in grocery stores and restaurants and on the street, and the more we talked about the show, it made me feel that while it is scary to be vulnerable and to be exposed, it helps empower people which is important to me.

Did you know in the early days of the show that it would make such an impact and touch so many lives?

No, no, no. As an actor, I was just trying to get a job and be able to do what I love to do, which was to understand other people's stories. I felt fortunate to have the opportunity since roughly 1 percent of aspiring actors actually get jobs, and even less get jobs that stick. I was given the opportunity to be a part of a show that changed the hearts and minds of so many people and, while the cast knew that it was special, we could not have imagined that it would make the impact it did – from the music to the writing to the acting. *This is Us* meant so much to so many, and this is truly gratifying for an actor.

What made the show so special?

I think it was so real that it became a blueprint for people's lives. I always say that we are all dealing with life on life's terms, which means that in our highest moments, we also can have some of our lowest moments, and Dan (Fogelman, writer of *This is Us*) wrote a show about this family where you could see yourself in the characters. The stories were very relatable, whether it be about the relationships with family, weight issues, dealing with illness, handling anxiety and depression – these are issues that every person on the planet deals with in one way or another. The show addressed these issues through a family that may not have handled things perfectly, but did it in a loving way.

You had empathy for them as you were watching the show, and I do not think there has ever been a show like it and I do not think that there ever will be another show like it in the future. *This is Us* brought people together – the story of regular people going through life and doing it the best way they knew how, while learning from each other in the process.

You mentioned how challenging is it for aspiring actors to secure a role. Did you know that you had the resilience to keep pushing and not give up?

I questioned myself all the time. I became an agent's assistant when I moved to Los Angeles, and I was a junior agent and then an agent for about nine years. I would see people going on auditions and trying to do what I wanted to do, and I questioned whether acting was my thing or whether I should continue to serve as an agent. Even to this day, after the amazing experience that I had on the show, I ask myself if I am meant to be an actor.

There was a time before I got the part on the show that I was ready to move back to Florida. I had been in Los Angeles for a number of years and I wondered if it was for me. It was almost 12 years until I booked *This is Us*, and looking back at it, I just kept putting one foot in front of the other and pushing forward. I remember my mother telling me that I could be miserable in Florida, or I could be miserable in Los Angeles, but at least in Los Angeles I was pursuing what I wanted to do. I had heard the saying that "you always give up before the miracle happens," and I almost did that, so I am so fortunate that I stayed. I think that things



Joyful Heart white wine blend

happen for a reason and while I would have loved to have a massive role in a hit show at the age of 21, I was not ready for it. *This is Us* came at the right time in my life and I could not have been more fortunate to be a part of it.

You also have a passion for music and went on tour this past summer. Will you discuss your focus on music?

Music was my first love. I was always entertaining my family and friends, and I was the class clown in high school. I thought that comedy may be my thing, and then in middle school my mom could not afford a band instrument – all the cool kids were in band – so I went to the room next to band and joined the choir. I became obsessed with music, and was taken by how a choir of 30 kids could sound like one voice. I listened to all genres of music, but my manager who I worked with before I went to Los Angeles wanted me to focus more on television and film, and I never really felt supported or encouraged with music.

I had been coming to Nashville during hiatus ever since I started on *This is Us*, and have been writing music which is about love and loss and healing. Feeling your feelings is uncomfortable, but music has provided a way to tell the story of my life and the things I have experienced and what I have gone through. I am so grateful to the amazing songwriters and producers in Nashville who I have had the opportunity to work with.

I am hoping one day that it will all come together and I will have the opportunity to do a stint on Broadway.

How challenging was it for you to deal with the realization that the show was coming to an end?

I am still grappling with it. There are moments when I am so sad and miss the show and the people that I was able to work with on the show. There are also moments when I am excited to have the time to pursue other opportunities and projects. This is new territory for me. I had never been on a television show that was so successful and had so much to do with who I was as a person. There are mornings that I wake up and am relieved that I do not have to be on set at 4:00 AM, and then there are mornings that I wish I was on set at 4:00 AM. I miss being this character that so many people learned from and loved, and I often wonder if I will ever again find something as special as that was for me, but I have come to know that there will be other projects that are special, just in a different way.

I am so gratified to have been a part of something that was truly special and iconic, and I think this is why I still grapple with my emotions about the show ending.

Do you feel that there has been progress in creating leading roles for women on television?

I think there has been progress and feel that Dan Fogelman and the executives at NBC and FOX putting a character like Kate on television was a big step. There had not been plus-size actresses in this type of role – they were usually the butt of the joke or would play roles as the friend to the leading actress. I believe that art imitates life, and because Dan, as well as NBC and FOX, were so adamant about having a

plus-size actor in the role, we now see all sorts of roles for women no matter what the age, race, or weight. There has been a lot of progress, but there is still a lot of work to do.

I believe that viewers want to see plus-size actors on television and in film, because 65 percent of the American population is “plus size” – it is important to put this term in quotes because it is pretty loosely used. People want to see themselves on television and it doesn't matter what they look like or where they come from, because everyone's story is deserving of being told.



Chrissy Metz with Joyful Heart Winemaker Nicole Walsb

You are a role model and inspiration to many young girls. In a world of social media and constant posting of photos, what do you say to young girls who don't feel that they fit in or belong?

I have a really hard time, especially as I get older, with the idea of what social media is and what people want to portray. It is always about the highlight reel. For my own mental and emotional health, I have really curated who I follow, and I ask myself each time if it is hurtful or if it is helpful. It is dangerous to see pictures that have been photoshopped and manipulated, and then to try to compare yourself to those pictures when they are not even real. This affects your mental and emotional health, and I think it is important to ask yourself what you are getting from social media, because there are so many more positive places we can be giving our energy to other than constantly scrolling and being made to feel bad about ourselves.

I try to tell young girls that if it is not making you happy, then it is not worth it. It is important not to rely on what people think or what people say, because what is important is how you feel about yourself. I think this is a conversation that we need to keep having with each other.

What were the keys to remaining true to yourself and who you are, even with all of the notoriety and success from the show?

I grew up in very humble surroundings. We lived paycheck to paycheck, so for me there was always a feeling that as quickly as it could come, it could go equally quickly. I feel that the only thing that matters in life is how we treat each other, because money and success are fleeting. I am focused on how I feel about myself and how I walk through the world. I try to be a good person. I try to be present. I try to be a good friend, a good girlfriend, a good daughter. That is what I want to be whether or not I have success on a television show.

You created the Joyful Heart Wine Company. What was your vision for the company and how do you define its mission?

I had always felt that wine was very pretentious, and I just wanted to find something that I liked to drink. My boyfriend, Bradley, knows about wine and there is such a science to it. Wine was always something I brought to someone's house for Sunday dinner, and I wanted to bring a wine that I loved and that I had something to do with. I wanted to be involved in the blending, and also wanted to create a wine that was accessible to people who just wanted to enjoy it.

The way that I want to walk through the world is with a joyful heart, and this has to do with being of service and giving. We created a wine that would give back, which we do through World Central Kitchen – we donate proceeds from every bottle to World Central Kitchen, an organization that has been on the front lines of so many challenging events around the world, providing food for people that are going through crisis.

I wanted to put love and good energy into a bottle of wine, and it not only tastes delicious, but it is making a difference.

What interested you in writing the book, *This is Me*, and what were its key messages you wanted to convey in the book?

I did not want to write a book – I was afraid to do it and did not think anyone wanted to hear from me. After talking to people, I decided that if I could write a book that talks about what I have gone through in my life, maybe it could help others. Every chapter is a lesson about something that happened in my life, and the more specific I got, the more it resonated with people. I would not be where I am today if I had not written the book.

My boyfriend, Bradley, and I just wrote a children's book together which is coming out in February, and we are very excited about it.

Are you able to take moments to reflect and appreciate what you have accomplished?

I feel that since the show has been done, which has been about nine months now, I have taken moments to appreciate what I have done and accomplished. It would not have happened without a lot of help and support, and I try to spend time with my family and with Bradley because it is about finding balance. I am fortunate to be in a position to be able to pursue things that make me happy, and it is my intention to do them with a joyful heart. ●