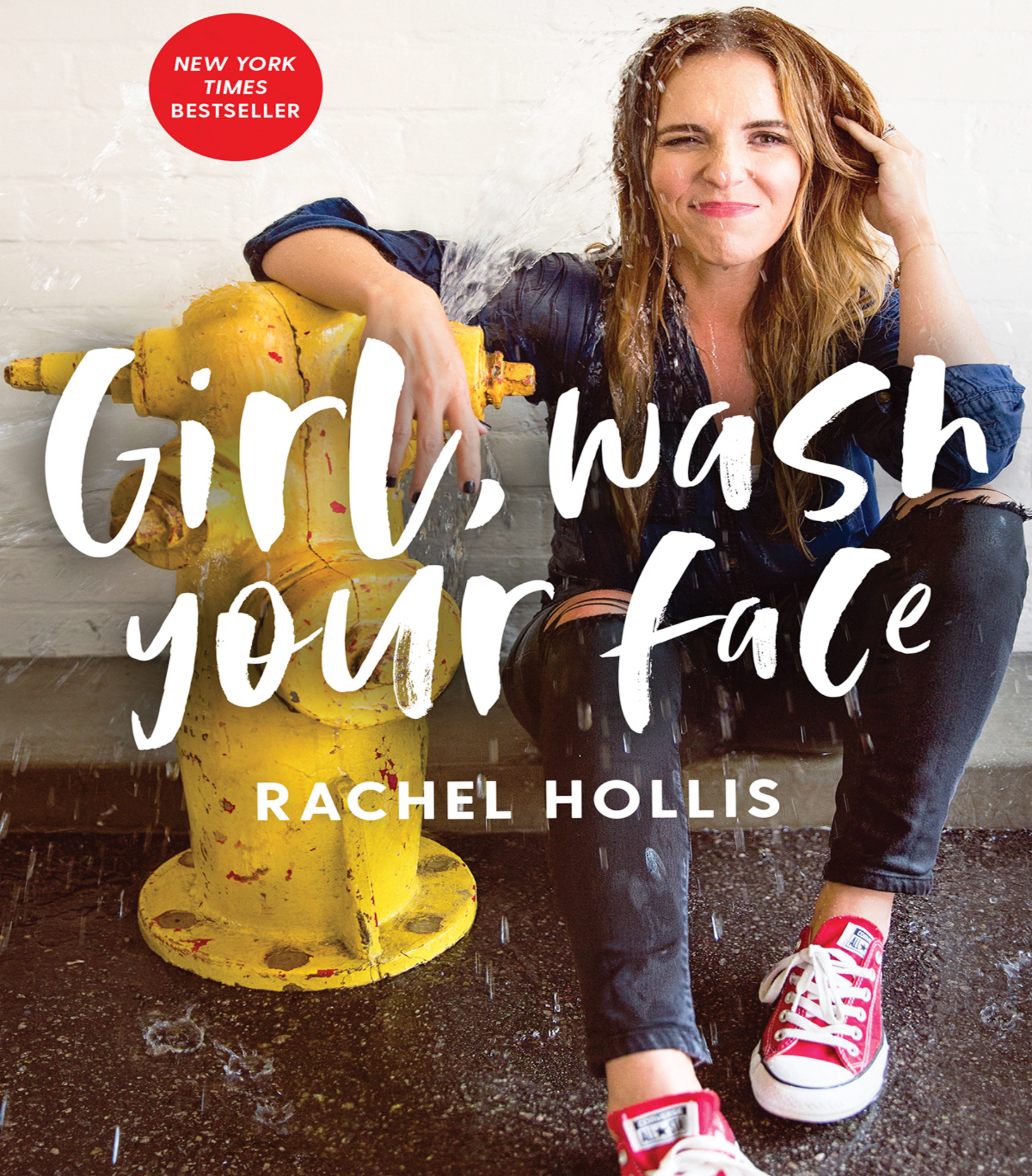


*Stop Believing the Lies About Who You Are  
So You Can Become Who You Were Meant to Be*

NEW YORK  
TIMES  
BESTSELLER

# Girl, wash your face

RACHEL HOLLIS





PRAISE FOR  
**Girl, Wash Your Face**

“If Rachel Hollis tells you to wash your face, turn on that water! She is the mentor every woman needs, from new mommas to seasoned business women.”

—**ANNA TODD**, *New York Times* and #1 internationally bestselling author of the *After* series

“Rachel’s voice is the winning combination of an inspiring life coach and your very best (and funniest) friend. Shockingly honest and hilariously down to earth, *Girl, Wash Your Face* is a gift to women who want to flourish and live a courageously authentic life.”

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“Rachel has one of those rare abilities to make you laugh out loud and also completely rethink your entire life all in one paragraph. Her words and this book are a gift and we know they’ll encourage and challenge you deeply.”

—**JEFFERSON AND ALYSSA BETHKE**, *New York Times* bestselling authors of *Jesus > Religion* and *Love That Lasts*

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You Can Become Who You Were Meant to Be*

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For Jen, who has shaken my worldview off its axis three times: once with *Interrupted*, once with a trip to Ethiopia, and lastly by teaching us all that a *real* leader speaks the truth, even to her own detriment.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Hey Girl, Hey!

This is the big opening letter to my book, the part where I tell you all the things I'm hoping for as you read it. This is the moment where I outline my intentions and—if you're already game to read on—this is where I fire you up more about what to anticipate. This is also the important letter for someone standing in the bookstore right now trying to decide if she should buy this book or, like, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*—and the words she's reading now will decide for her. I mean, that feels like a lot of pressure for one little letter, but here we go.

This book is about a bunch of hurtful lies and one important truth.

The truth? You, and only you, are ultimately responsible for who you become and how happy you are. That's the takeaway.

Don't get me wrong. I'm going to tell a hundred stories that are funny or weird or embarrassing or sad or crazy, but each of them is reaching for this same pithy, Pinterest-worthy truth: your life is up to *you*.

But that truth will never be believable if you don't first understand the lies that get in the way of it. Understanding that you choose your own happiness, that you have control of your own life, is so important. It's one of those things we grasp with both hands and put up on the bulletin board as a reminder . . . but it's not the only thing you need to understand.

You also need to identify—and systematically destroy—every lie you've told yourself your whole life.

Why?

Because it's impossible to go somewhere new, to *become* something new, without first acknowledging where you are. The self-awareness that comes from truly digging into what you've come to believe about who you are is invaluable.

Have you ever believed that you aren't good enough? That you're not thin enough? That you're unlovable? That you're a bad mom? Have you ever believed that you deserve to be treated badly? That you'll never amount to anything?

All lies.

All lies perpetuated by society, the media, our family of origin, or frankly—and this is my Pentecostal showing—by the Devil himself. These lies are dangerous and devastating to our sense of worth and our ability to function. The most sinister thing about them is that we rarely hear them at all. We rarely hear the lies we've created about ourselves because they've been playing so loudly in our ears for so long that they've become white noise. The hateful narrative bombards us every day, yet we don't even realize it's there. Recognizing the lies we've come to accept about ourselves is the key to growing into a better version of ourselves. If we can identify the core of our struggles while simultaneously understanding that we are truly in control of conquering them, then we can utterly change our trajectory.

That's why I do what I do. That's why I run a website and talk about how to make a centerpiece, or parent with kindness, or strengthen a marriage. It's why I researched thirty different ways to clean out your front-load washer before I taught my tribe how to do it. It's why I know the perfect ratio of balsamic and citrus to make your pot roast taste amazing. Sure, I cover a whole host of topics using my online platform, but ultimately they boil down to one thing: these are the elements of my life, and I want to do them well. The posts demonstrate how I am growing and learning, and I want them to grow and encourage other women too. I suppose if I'd been into homeschooling or knitting or photography or macramé, I would have used those things to try and better myself and boost up my friends. But I'm not into those things. I'm into lifestyle stuff, so I focus on creating content that falls under the banner of lifestyle media.

Early on in this career, though, I realized that a lot of women look at lifestyle imagery as what they *should* aspire to be. Many of those images are impossible—another lie foisted upon us—so I set out to be honest from the beginning. I vowed to be authentic and sincere, and for every gloriously styled cupcake picture we produced, I shared a photo of myself with facial paralysis. If I went somewhere fancy like the Oscars, I balanced that with a post about my struggle with weight loss and pictures of me forty pounds heavier. I've talked about it all: struggles in my marriage, postpartum depression, and feeling jealous, scared, angry, ugly, unworthy, unloved. I have tried to be totally real about who I am and where I'm coming from. Seriously, the most famous thing I've ever done was to post a picture of the stretch marks on my saggy tummy on the internet. And yet . . .

And yet I still get the notes. Women from all over the world still email and ask me how I manage to keep it all together while they struggle. I can *feel* the pain in those emails. I can hear the shame in the words they use to describe their own hardships, and it makes my heart hurt.

So I write them back. I tell every single one how beautiful and strong she is. I call them *warrior, courageous, fighter*. I tell them not to give up. It's what feels appropriate to say to a total stranger. But it's not all I want to say. It's not what I would say if it were my sister who was hurting, or my best friend. It's not what I wish I could say to my younger self. Because to those closest to me, I am supportive and encouraging . . . but I absolutely refuse to watch you wallow.

The truth is that *you are* strong and courageous and a fighter . . . but if I'm telling you that, it's because I want you to see those characteristics in yourself. I want to grab you by the shoulders and shake you until your teeth rattle. I want to get in your face until you have the courage to look me in the eyes and see the answer for yourself. I want to shout at the top of my lungs until you know this one great truth: you are in control of your own life. You get one and only one chance to live, and life is passing you by. Stop beating yourself up, and dang it, stop letting others do it too. Stop accepting less than you deserve. Stop buying things you can't afford to impress people you don't even really like. Stop eating your feelings instead of working through them. Stop buying your kids' love with food, or toys, or friendship because it's easier than parenting. Stop abusing your body and your mind. Stop! Just get off the never-ending track. Your life is supposed to be a journey from one unique place to another; it's not supposed to be a merry-go-round that brings you back to the same spot over and over again.

Your life doesn't have to look like mine. Heck, your life doesn't have to look like anyone else's at all, but it should at least be a creation of your own making.

Is it going to be hard? Absolutely! But taking the easy way out is how you end up on the sofa, fifty pounds overweight, while life passes you by.

Will change happen overnight? No way! This is a lifelong process. You'll try out some different tools and techniques, and while some of them will feel okay, maybe one will feel like



the answer and then thirty-seven different others will feel like garbage. Then you'll wake up tomorrow and do it again. And again. And again.

And you'll fail.

You'll fall off the wagon. You'll eat half of a birthday cake when no one is watching or scream at your husband or drink too much wine all month long. You'll fall into ruts because this is life and that's just how it goes. But once you understand that *you* are the one who is truly in control, you'll get up and try again. And you'll keep going until being in control feels more natural than being out of control. It'll become a way of life, and you'll become the person you are meant to be.

It's worth asking, right here, right up front, where faith plays a role in all of this. As a Christian I grew up learning that God was in control, that God had a plan for my life, and I believe in the marrow of my bones that this is true. I believe God loves each of us unconditionally, but I don't think that means we get to squander the gifts and talents he's given us simply because we're good enough already. A caterpillar is awesome, but if the caterpillar stopped there—if she just decided that *good is good enough*—we would all miss out on the beautiful creature she would become.

You are more than you have become.

That's what I want to tell the women who write to me asking for advice. It might be tough to hear, but that knowledge is followed by this sweet truth: you are more than you have become, and you are utterly in control over what you do with that knowledge.

Which led me to an idea.

What if I wrote a whole book about all the ways I have struggled and then explained the steps that helped me get past those times? What if I talked about all of my failures and embarrassing moments? What if you knew that my biggest shame is that I sometimes get so angry I scream at my children? Not holler, not yell, not scold them strongly, but scream so loudly it nauseates me to think of it later. What if you hear that I likely have at least three cavities in my mouth right now because I am petrified of the dentist? What if I talked about my cellulite, or the weird third boob thing that sits in between my arm and my regular boob when I wear a tank top? Did I mention back fat? Or the hair that grows out of the mole on my face? Or my insecurities? What if I started a book by telling you that I peed my pants as an adult, as a fully grown human, and it wasn't the first time, nor will it be the last? And what if I told you that even in spite of my confessions—be they funny, embarrassing, painful, or gross—I am at peace with myself? That I love who I am even when I do things I'm not proud of? And that it's possible because I know I am ultimately in control of making change? I am in control over the person I will become. By the grace of God, I will wake up tomorrow and have another chance to do this life better. By the grace of God, I've had thirty-five years of *trying* so hard in some areas of my life (like the creation of cheese-based casseroles) that I am crushing it. And in other areas (like controlling my anxiety) I am constantly working on different angles to attack the same problem.

It's a lifelong journey, but I rest in the knowledge that every day I'm learning and growing, which lets me feel at peace with myself.

The things I've struggled with? The lies I've believed about myself for so long?

The list is a mile long. So long, in fact, that I decided to dedicate a chapter to each one. Every single section of this book begins with a lie that I believed, and what follows are the stories of how that particular lie held me back, hurt me, and in some cases, caused me to hurt others. But by admitting to these lies, I have taken their power away. I'll share with you how I made changes in my life to overcome the struggles—some for good, and some as an ever-evolving dance between myself and lifelong insecurities.

What are my insecurities? Well, here are some of the biggest and the baddest in no particular order. I hope they'll encourage you. I hope you'll find the ideas helpful. More than anything, I hope you'll rest in the knowledge that you can become whomever and whatever you want to be, my sweet friend. And on the days that seem the hardest, you'll remember that—by an inch or a mile—forward momentum is the only requirement.

*Love,  
Rach*

## CHAPTER 1

### The Lie:

#### SOMETHING ELSE WILL MAKE ME HAPPY

I peed my pants last week.

Not *full-on* peed my pants, like that one time at summer camp when I was ten years old. We were playing capture the flag, and I couldn't hold it a second longer. I didn't want to admit that I'd just wet my pants, so I doused myself with a bottle of water. Imagine, if you will, that once all of my clothes were wet, no one—most especially Christian Clark, my camp crush—was the wiser. I was resourceful even then.

Did others find it odd that I was suddenly soaking wet?

Probably.

But I'd rather be an oddball than a pants-wetter any day of the week.

As for last week, this wasn't *that* level of peeing my pants. This was just your regular I've-pushed-three-babies-out-of-my-body dribbling.

Giving birth to a baby is like a space shuttle launch. Everything gets destroyed on the way out, which means that sometimes, you guys, I pee my pants. If this knowledge hurts your tender sensibilities, then I'm going to assume you haven't had bladder-control problems—and I offer you my congratulations. However, if my experience makes sense to you, then you probably have this problem too—which means you just laughed a little, having experienced a similar predicament.

I was jumping with my boys out back, and somebody hollered for me to show off a midair toe touch. This is my only known skill on a trampoline, and if I'm going to work up the gumption to hoist myself onto that spring-loaded death trap, you'd better believe I'm going to give it my all. One second I was soaring through the air like one of the extra-tiny gals they launch into basket tosses during a cheerleading competition, and the next moment my pants were wet. Nobody noticed—unless you count my pride—but it happened just the same. I had to keep jumping so that the continuous wind rush would dry out my shorts. I'm resourceful, remember? The timing was perfection, too, because not thirty minutes later, a previously programmed Facebook post went up showing me trying on dresses for the Oscars.

Before you get the wrong impression, I am not fancy enough to go to the Academy Awards. I am, however, married to someone ultra hunky. He's not really fancy either, but his job certainly is. That means that sometimes I get to wear dresses like a princess and drink free wine in well-lit ballrooms. In these instances, photos show up on Instagram or Facebook of us looking well coiffed and ultra glam, and the internet goes wild. This is prime real estate for

people to write me notes about how glamorous my life is, how stylish and fashionable and perfect my world must be. And all I can think when I read those comments later is, *I've just peed myself, in public, surrounded by other human beings*. I've literally gone to the bathroom *in the air* while trying to force my hamstrings into unnatural gymnastic positions in order to impress my three-year-old.

Y'all, I'm about as unglamorous as you can get.

And I don't mean that in a celebrity, *stars-are-just-like-us* kind of way. This is not like that time Gwyneth went makeup-free and, with her perfect skin and her angel-blonde hair, tried to convince us she was just a regular gal even in her four-hundred-dollar T-shirt.

No, I mean this literally.

I am not glamorous. I am 1,000 percent one of the nerdiest people you're likely to meet. If I've somehow managed to convince you otherwise because I run a lifestyle website with pretty pictures, or because my hair looks extra shiny on Instagram sometimes, well, sister, let me set you straight. I am not a perfect wife, not a perfect mother, not a perfect friend or boss, and most definitely not a perfect Christian. Not. Even. Close. I'm not perfect at anything I do—well, except for making and eating dishes that are primarily cheese-based—but the other stuff, the *life* stuff? Oh girl, I'm struggling.

I feel like it's important to say that. Important enough to base an entire book around the idea, in fact, because I want to make sure you *hear it*.

I am so incredibly flawed in big ways and small ways and sideways and beside ways, and *I make a living telling other women how to better their lives*. Me—of the workout regimens and DIY skin-brightening scrub. Me—with the tips on cooking Thanksgiving dinner and the itemized list of how to parent your kids. Me—I am failing.

All. The. Time.

This is important because I want you to understand, my sweet, precious friend, that *we're all falling short*. Yet even though I fail over and over and over again, I don't let it deter me. I still wake up every day and try again to become a better version of myself. Some days I feel as if I'm getting closer to the best version of me. Other days I eat cream cheese for dinner. But the gift of life is that we get another chance tomorrow.

Somewhere along the way women got the wrong information. Or, I should say, we got *so much* of the wrong information that we washed our hands of the whole thing. We live in an all-or-nothing society that says I need to look, act, think, and speak perfectly or just throw in the towel and stop trying altogether.

That's what I worry about the most—that you've stopped trying. I get notes from readers and see thousands of comments on my social media feeds. Some of you feel so overwhelmed by your life that you've given up. You're a piece of jetsam being tugged along with the tide. It feels too hard to keep up with the game, so you've quit playing. Oh sure, you're still here. You still show up for work, you still make dinner and take care of your kids, but you're always playing catch-up. You always feel behind and overwhelmed.

Life is not supposed to overwhelm you at all times. Life isn't meant to be merely survived—it's meant to be *lived*.

Seasons or instances will inevitably feel out of your control, but the moments when you feel like you're drowning are supposed to be brief. They should not be the whole of your existence! The precious life you've been given is like a ship navigating its way across the ocean, and you're meant to be the captain of the vessel. Certainly there are times when storms toss you around or cover the deck with water or break the mast clean in half—but that's when you need to fight your way back, to throw all the water off the boat bucket by bucket. That's



when you battle to get yourself back to the helm. This is *your* life. You are meant to be the hero of your own story.

This doesn't mean you become selfish. This doesn't mean you discard your faith or quit believing in something greater than yourself. What it means is taking responsibility for your own life and your own happiness. Said another way—a harsher, more-likely-to-get-me-punched-in-the-face way—if you're unhappy, *that's on you*.

When I say unhappy, I mean *unhappy*. I don't mean *depressed*. True depression has everything to do with your genetic makeup and the chemical balance in your body. As someone who's battled depression personally, I have the utmost compassion for anyone who's going through it. I also don't mean *sadness*. Sadness or grief brought on by circumstances outside of your control—like the soul-shredding loss of a loved one—is not something that can be walked through quickly or easily. Sadness and pain are things you have to sit with and get to know or you'll never be able to move on.

When I say unhappy, I mean discontented, unsettled, frustrated, angry—any of a number of emotions that make us want to hide from our lives instead of embracing them with arms wide open like a Creed song. Because happy people—the ones who are enjoying their lives 90 percent of the time—do exist. You've seen them. In fact, you're reading a book written by one right now.

Ultimately, I think that's what people are commenting on in my photos. They're saying, "Your life looks so perfect," but what I think they mean is, "Your life seems happy. You look content. You're always optimistic and grateful. You're always laughing."

I want to explain why . . .

I didn't have an easy start. Actually, if I am being honest, the word I would use to describe much of my childhood is *traumatic*. Our house was chaotic—the highest highs and the lowest lows. There were big parties filled with family and friends, followed by screaming and fighting and crying. Fist-sized holes would find their way into the walls, and plates would shatter against the kitchen floor. My father handled stress with anger; my mother handled it by going to bed for weeks at a time. Like most children who grow up similarly, I didn't know there was any other way to be a family.

Then, when I was fourteen years old, my big brother, Ryan, committed suicide. The things I saw and went through that day will haunt me forever, but they also changed me in a fundamental way. I was the baby of four children and had spent my life up until that point largely ignorant of the world outside my own home. But when Ryan died, our already turbulent and troubled home shattered. If life was difficult before he died, it was untenable afterward.

I grew up in that single day. And amid the anguish and fear and confusion of his death, I recognized a great truth: if I wanted a better life than the one I'd been born into, it was up to me to create it.

The year he died I was a freshman in high school, and I immediately started taking as many classes as I could in order to graduate early. My junior year, I received my diploma and moved to Los Angeles, the closest major city to my small California hometown. To this country mouse, LA seemed like the kind of place where any dream could come true. I was seventeen years old, not even grown-up enough to get a phone line or sign the lease on my apartment without an adult signature, but all I could focus on was finally getting away. For years I'd lived within the chaos of my childhood home thinking, *Someday I'll get out of here, and then I'll be happy*.

How could I not be happy in LA? I soaked up every inch of it from the second my feet hit the ground. I absorbed the frenetic energy of Hollywood and adapted to the rhythm of the

waves rolling to shore along PCH. A multidimensional skyline made me feel worldly. I appreciated the kind of views that only an outsider would see.

Most people don't notice the trees in Beverly Hills. They're much too busy coveting the mansions that sit below them, but the trees were one of the first things I saw. I gloried in beauty for the sake of beauty, since that sort of thing hadn't existed in the place where I'd grown up. The thing is, the trees all match in Beverly Hills. On any given street, around any given corner, and even amid the chaos of a bustling city, you will see row after row of perfect symmetry—a menagerie of Canary Island pines and camphor trees and date palms. They were laid out by the original landscape architect back at the beginning of the twentieth century. They hug the wide streets in meticulous rows, silent sentinels of one of the world's most affluent cities. After a lifetime of chaos, I delighted in the order.

*Finally, I thought to myself, I'm where I belong.*

Time passed and seasons changed, and my new city eventually taught me one of the most vital lessons I've ever learned. Moving or traveling or getting away? It's just geography. Moving doesn't change who you are. It only changes the view outside your window. You must *choose* to be happy, grateful, and fulfilled. If you make that choice every single day, regardless of where you are or what's happening, you will be happy.

I get to see my best friend, Amanda, a few times a year. Every time we hang out we talk until our throats are sore and laugh until our cheeks hurt. Amanda and I would have just as much fun hanging out in my living room as we would lying on a beach in Mexico. Now, granted, Mexico is prettier, the weather is nicer, and we'd have easier access to cocktails with little umbrellas in them . . . but we can have a great time whether we're in my backyard or behind the Dumpster at the local Walmart because we're so excited to hang out with each other. When you're engaged and involved and choosing to enjoy your own life, it doesn't matter where you are, or frankly, what negative things get hurled at you. You'll still find happiness because it's not about *where* you are but *who* you are.

## THINGS THAT HELPED ME . . .

1. ***I stopped comparing myself.*** I stopped comparing myself to other people, and I also stopped comparing myself to whomever I thought I was supposed to be. Comparison is the death of joy, and the only person you need to be better than is the one you were yesterday.
2. ***I surrounded myself with positivity.*** I cringe even writing that because it sounds like a poster you'd see taped to the wall of your eighth-grade gym class—but cheesy or not, it's gospel. You become who you surround yourself with. You become what you consume. If you find yourself in a slump or feel as though you're living in a negative space, take a good hard look at who and what you see every day.
3. ***I figured out what makes me happy and I do those things.*** This seems like the most obvious idea in the world, but at the end of the day, very few people intentionally choose the things that bring them joy. No, I don't mean that you can build a life around massages and lavish dinners (or maybe you can, fancy pants!). I mean that you should spend more time doing things that feed your spirit: more long walks with your dog, less volunteering for that thing you feel obligated to do but actually hate. You are in charge of your own life, sister, and there's not one thing in it that you're not *allowing* to be there. Think about it.