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foreword

Whenever you learn to do something complex, like drive a car, no one expects you to just start doing it, learning everything by trial and error. That's why there's driver's ed. If you had to learn to drive just by trial and error, you might try to drive right into a tight parallel parking spot, rather than backing in at an angle. Without some guidance, you might misjudge the distance between your car and another car as you merge into traffic, perhaps with disastrous consequences.

Consider this book a driver's education course for living.

Classroom instruction on how to drive can't do everything—real skill in anything comes only with experience. A person learning to drive might at first use a mental checklist to remember to look to the left and right at a stop sign, or to look in the rearview and side mirrors before passing. Eventually, all of that will be done smoothly and instinctively. A driver's ed class can't do the practicing part for you, but it can help you begin the learning process on the right foot.

This book is about the most complex thing you possess—your own mind. We get a little “driver's education” about our own minds from what others tell us, but it turns out that a lot of conventional advice is pretty far off from what really works. There is a science of psychology, and careful research has regularly arrived at conclusions that go almost in the opposite direction of what the culture, our friends, or the media tell us to do. That's a problem. If behavioral science is right, it means we tend to practice the wrong moves, and practice them so frequently that they become instinctive.

Here is an example. Emotions are sometimes painful. By trial and error, we can easily learn to do things that make that pain go away for a while. If we are afraid of giving a talk in a class, we can take another class, or feign illness, or talk our way out of it,

or pretend we don't feel like it. Success in any of these will make the fear go down temporarily—but, ironically, they will all subtly increase the power of fear over our lives. All methods for avoiding painful feelings do that, even the less obvious methods such as pretending not to feel fear, because they all contain the deep message that fear is something to be afraid of.

This book teaches a counterintuitive alternative that has been developed and tested by behavioral scientists: admit the fear, take time to feel it with a sense of genuine curiosity, and then carry it as you might carry your wallet in your back pocket, without letting it dominate over values-based actions. That approach allows us to learn what there is to learn from fear, while also gradually decreasing the power of fear over our lives.

You don't have to trust scientists about these things. You can trust your own experience, because the new skills in this book will pay off very quickly. Once you learn the skills, you can feel yourself becoming more skillful and agile in much the same way that a driver practicing good driving skills quickly notices that her driving is becoming more natural, fluid, and effective.

I wrote the original *Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life*, and it made a lot of sense to me to bring this work to teens in a new way, with examples and methods that fit the challenges teens are facing. These three authors are experts in working with teens and, after reading this book, it seems even clearer to me that this was the right thing to do. I recognize the similarity between the issues faced by some of the teens I've worked with and the issues addressed in the vignettes in this book. The authors have cut out unimportant material and presented what is central in a clear and accessible way. The language is direct. The authors don't talk down to you, the reader.

One of the most important things about this “driver's education course for living” is that it does not try to tell you where to go, any more than your driver's ed teacher will tell you *where* to drive once you get your license. Rather, it is focused on how to get there. Teenagers are used to being told what to do by adults, and there is not a need for a book that does more of that.

This book aims to help you live your life your way. That sense you have of wanting to live free will be your ally in reading and using it. The book asks what you care about and tries to get in contact with your deeper wisdom. In a sense, you need to decide whose life this is anyway—whether it's yours or whether it belongs to the thoughts and feelings that have been programmed into you.

That is what human freedom is all about. It is the same issue every human being faces, but if you are a teenager it is exciting and wonderful that you have in your hands a book that will encourage you to examine your values early in life and to learn how to use this mind of yours, instead of having it use you.

—Steven C. Hayes Professor of Psychology, University of Nevada Author of *Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life*

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introduction: this book is for you

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, handsome, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be?

—Marianne Williamson

There aren't many teenagers who want to open a book like this one, let alone go on to read it. There is a big possibility that an adult in your life asked you to read this, said it might help you, or said there's something wrong with you and this book will fix you. And there's also a big chance that you seriously doubt whether that adult understands you at all. We bet you think this book won't change one single thing.

How do we know?

Well, this book is based on two things: the science behind human behavior, and our experience of working with a lot of teenagers. While we don't know you or your problems, we have listened to what a lot of other teenagers have told us, and we've also learned from what the research shows. We know that most teenagers don't expect a book to help and that they think the adults in their life are way out of touch.

But life is full of surprises. And if you're willing to read on, we hope this little book will offer something that surprises you.

School requires that you spend years studying math, science, geography, literature, and so on. But think about this: How much time do you spend learning human knowledge, about how to deal with difficult thoughts and feelings? How much time do you

spend developing knowledge about *you*—an individual who has wants, needs, interests, and a voice that deserves to be heard?

This book is about developing your knowledge of what it means to be a human being and how to cultivate inner strength. Along the way, we'll look at the battle that goes on within each human being. You'll learn about your struggle to understand yourself, to know your thoughts and feelings, and to manage fear and doubt. You'll learn how to move into your life with strength—the strength of a warrior.

We'll also help you explore the secrets and passions within you. You'll discover your strengths, recognize and celebrate what it means to be you, learn more about friendship and relationships, and explore how you can live your dreams. There's no better time to discover this than now!

As you read on, please keep something important in mind: No matter how you came to be holding this book, it is not for others—not for the person or people who say you should read it—this book is for *you*. Our greatest hope is that it helps you on your journey toward living your dreams.

PART 1

GETTING STARTED

Although I'm only fourteen, I know quite well what I want, ... I have my opinions, my own ideas and principles, and although it may sound pretty mad from an adolescent, I feel more of a person than a child, I feel quite independent of anyone.

—Anne Frank

Chapter 1

what if everybody is hiding a secret?

Every man has his secret sorrows which the world knows not.

—mdashenry Wadsworth Longfellow

One of the best ways to develop your knowledge about life is to take a peek at the battles other people face. What are they going through? What are they struggling with?

In this chapter we'll introduce you to several teenagers and their battles. See whether you can relate their struggles to some of the things you've been going through. Take some time to think about whether any of their stories are similar to your own experience. You'll find that by learning to observe another person's struggles, you can become better at understanding your own.

The Loser



I was a teenage loser. I was a guy with no social skills who didn't know how to make and keep friends, didn't know how to protect myself from bullies, and didn't know how to talk to girls. I spent a lot of time escaping into fantasy—daydreaming, playing video games, and listening to music by myself.

I couldn't talk to my mom. She lived somewhere else and never called. I felt like I couldn't talk to my dad. He was so busy with his own stuff that he didn't have much time for me. He had no idea that I got picked on. He didn't know about the time that an older kid chased me home from school. The only time he noticed me was when I got into trouble. One

time a kid was teasing me about my dirty sneakers and just wouldn't stop. He kept calling me "Clorox, Clorox." I got so angry but didn't know what to do, and finally I just hit him in the face. The kid lost a tooth and I got expelled. My dad yelled at me and grounded me, but he didn't ask me why I got in the fight in the first place.

I struggled as a teenager. I pretended that everything was okay and that I didn't care about anything. I got terrible grades and eventually flunked out of school. I thought about committing suicide.

The Girl Who Disappeared

I always wondered what it would be like to disappear in a puff of smoke. Everyone would be left behind saying, "What happened? She was here just a minute ago. We don't know where she went. It seems like she's left the planet!"

I wanted to disappear, and pretty much any way of doing so would have been fine. Maybe I could die instantly in an accident or even fall down a rabbit hole like Alice. I would have done anything if it would have gotten me out of my life.

So I dropped out of school and disappeared into my bedroom. I escaped through music and the posters on my wall. I loved it there. Who needs to live in the real world anyway? I spent years in that room, where I didn't have to face school, homework, adults, or bullies who would punch me in the face, sneak up behind me and tear my hair out by the roots, or spread rumors about me. No one could hurt me in my room. And no one knew why I went there; that was my secret.

I had everything I needed in that bedroom—almost. There was just one problem: my shame was in there with me. After all, only losers can't cope with life, right?

The Girl Who Fooled Them All

I was a popular girl. I wore trendy clothes and hung out with the right people. Anybody who looked at me would have thought that I had everything.

I had them fooled. Every day of my life was filled with the terror of being found out as a fraud. I secretly believed that there was something wrong with me and that I just had everyone convinced otherwise, at least for the moment. At some level, I admired the kids who were isolated. At least they could survive on their own.

I lived in fear and had a hard time eating or sleeping. I would spend three weekends finding the “right” pair of white school sneakers, down to the pattern on the rubber sole, just so I could bear to walk through the school gate. I spent days thinking about every syllable, gesture, and word that came out of the mouths of my so-called friends: What did he mean by that? Why didn’t she look at me when she said hi? On and on it went, year after year. It was exhausting.

That was the game. You had to be funnier, louder, skinnier, better—but not too much better. I had to walk a fine line. I had to be just good enough. And the most important rule? Never let anyone see your fear. Yet I was so afraid that I was always on the verge of panic. I hated the way my hair, skin, and body looked every moment. I felt so awkward. The worst thing was that I didn’t have the first clue about who I was. And I hated myself for it.

How Did Their Battles End?

Fast-forward a few years (okay, a lot of years). Those three teenagers eventually graduated from college, found friends, and found love. Today their lives are still hard in a lot of ways, but they have a better idea of who they are, and they’re living

according to what's important to them.

Those three people are the authors of this book: Joseph, Louise, and Ann.

When we were teenagers, we thought everybody else had an easy time of it. Each of us thought we were the only person struggling. We were wrong—so wrong. Eventually, we all studied psychology to fix what we thought was broken in us. But in the process, we discovered that everybody struggles. Even the most successful people have many unhappy experiences, in addition to their positive experiences. In fact, human emotions shift all the time, minute by minute, hour by hour, and day by day. Everybody experiences emotional pain, whether in the form of fear, sadness, shame, or self-doubt. We all struggle to find and build friendships. We all struggle with love, and we all fear rejection. We all want to look strong and cool on the outside, even if we feel weak and terrible on the inside.

Most people look happy on the outside because society teaches us to put on a happy face. Everybody tends to keep their fears a secret, so we don't get the chance to learn that others are struggling too. This is what we mean by everybody having the same secret. Everybody struggles at some point in life, and everybody seeks to hide this struggle from others.

If there's one key thing we hope you'll get from this book, it's this: that you can live your way. You can develop your knowledge about yourself, about people, and about your possibilities, and this will help you create a life that lets you express your talents and interests. Don't ever let anybody tell you otherwise. When people tell you that you can't live your way, don't believe them.

The Wrap-Up

We want you to take heart from knowing that we, the authors of this book, survived our teenage struggles. It took us years, but eventually we found a way through. We learned to hear our own voices over the noise of people telling us what we should and