

Chapter 1: Getting to Know Each Other

Let's get one thing straight, right off the bat.

I love you.

Okay...that may seem a little weird. I know what you're thinking. "She doesn't even know me!"

The truth is...I do know you. You are, after all, a *Girl on the Run*. You are vibrant. You are fun. You are honest. You are generally happy. You say what's on your mind. You are active. You are **Real!**

You are everything I want to be.

Ten years ago I started *Girls on the Run* for many reasons, but one of the most important reasons was this:

I knew that you would love me back.

Girls like you are usually pretty open-minded and accepting. I knew that you wouldn't make fun of me or put me down. I knew that when I was having a bad day, spending time with you would move me closer to a better mood.

I knew that you had the kind of love for life that I wanted. So, when I started *Girls on the Run*, it was a win-win kind of endeavor.

You get something out of it and so do I.

Now don't get me wrong. I know life isn't always happy, joyous and free. It can be tough, nowadays, being a girl.

Sometimes we can be mean.

Sometimes we can really hurt each other's feelings.

Sometimes we feel ugly. Trying to feel beautiful about ourselves is a challenge when all we see in magazines are pictures of girls and women that have been created on a computer. Sometimes we compare ourselves to those pictures and feel like we don't measure up.

Sometimes we feel dumb. Not every girl in the world can make straight A's, and when we don't, it's hard to find the "smarts" inside of us.

Sometimes we feel unpopular. We might feel like we don't fit in or we don't look right in our clothes. We might look in the mirror and wish that we could look like someone else.

I know you feel all of these things sometimes. Because, you know what? I do too. I'm just an older girl inside an older body. But my friends and I all struggle with the same kind of feelings. Even 40 year-olds want to be popular, sometimes.

When I started *Girls on the Run*, I had been living the life of the girl who never felt like she quite fit in. I never felt pretty enough, smart enough, sassy enough, fashionable enough... ***I never felt like being myself was good enough.***

And so when I was in about sixth grade, I went into the "Girl Box." The "Girl Box" is this imaginary place where many girls go around sixth grade. In the "Girl Box" we say farewell to the really cool girl that we are and we begin to try to be a girl we think will make us popular.

It all started when my best friend, Frances, started getting breasts and I didn't. Suddenly she was getting all kinds of attention from boys, and I felt left out. Nothing about me was any different than I had been the summer before, but I felt invisible. No one was talking to me anymore. No one was looking at me anymore.

I realized that if I started acting silly and flirtatious, instead of just being myself, I could get some of the attention Frances was getting. I cried a lot my sixth-grade year. I felt like girls would form groups and leave me out. One of the girls in my class even bullied me during P.E. by throwing the basketball at my face.

About four years later, when I was 15 years old, I started running with my mom. My mom was one of the coolest women around. My mother and I were very close. The two of us would go running at 6:00 in the morning, before school. I can close my eyes now and feel the cool morning air on my face, feel the sweat as it would roll down the sides of my face, hear our breathing and the scuffle of our footsteps as they would hit the sidewalk, step for step.

I loved to run. Running for me was the one time during my day when I felt like I was my old self again. I didn't worry about what I looked like or what people thought about me. My mind would empty itself of all of my

thoughts and I could rediscover the fun, energetic and genuine girl I had left behind in sixth grade...when I went into the "Girl Box."

I was myself again.

It's kind of weird, but it was also when I was about 15, that I started doing some things that were really bad for me. I had my first cigarette, started going to parties and generally began acting like girls who were very lost in the "Girl Box."

Sadly, this lack of respect for myself began to get me the attention I had always wanted. I immediately became one of the popular girls. I suddenly, from an outsider's point of view, seemed to fit in.

Yet (and this is the *best* part about being old), I can look back over my life and gain something called *perspective*. That means I can look at the path my life has taken from a viewpoint that puts the experiences of my life into some kind of meaningful sequence. I can now look back and see that I was one of the saddest girls in the world. I cried a lot, spent too much time worrying about what I looked like, dieted a lot, fought with so called friends all the time and still, never had boyfriends who respected the real me. Even when I looked like I had it all together, I never really *felt* like I did.

I was a girl who had given up.

I was a girl who had given in.

I was a girl lost in the "Girl Box."

Fast forward 10 years. I am 25 years old and I've graduated from college. At that time I was teaching high school chemistry and competing in a very tough endurance sport called the triathlon.

A triathlon is where you swim, bike, and run...very long distances...and all in one day!!!

I was one of the best triathletes in the country. When I was training for and competing in triathlons, I felt free of the painful "Girl Box" that was defining who I was. I, for that brief part of my day, was the beautiful and free-spirited Molly I had been in fourth grade. I was happy, confident and joyous.

The rest of the time, however, I wasn't much fun to be around. I was a difficult person. I gossiped a lot about people. I was angry. I hated the way I looked and I never followed through on promises I had made. I was very irresponsible and unreliable.

My family was beginning to worry about me.

Fast forward again, about seven years, to 1993. I had just completed an Ironman Triathlon. (That's a triathlon where you swim 2.4 miles in the ocean, bike 112 miles across very hot black lava fields in Hawaii and run 26.2 miles through rolling hills.) If you had looked at me back then, you would have seen one of the "fittest" looking people around. I was tan, lean, muscular, athletic and strong.

Yet, if you were to unzip my skin and turn me inside out...you would have seen that I was, on the inside, one of the unhealthiest people around. Behaviors I'd exhibited over the course of my "Girl Box" lifetime, up until then, were wreaking havoc on my health. My stomach was upset. My blood pressure was occasionally too high from unhealthy foods and stress and my lifestyle included very risky behaviors.

The most significant trait you would have noticed was I was "lightless." This means that the little light—the star—that shone inside of my soul was almost out. I felt so much shame about the person I had become...that I just quit allowing myself to feel anything. I was dull, sad and felt all alone.

I was depressed.

So on July 6, 1993, I called my big sister. I didn't know who else to call. (Aren't big sisters great?) I asked her to help me *feel* again. I asked her what I should do so I didn't feel so bad about myself all the time. I asked her to help get the painful "Girl Box" off of my life.

She lived far, far away so she couldn't actually hold me while I cried. But what she did was help me calm my tears. She talked to me in a soothing voice. She told me she loved me and that someday I would know why all of this was happening. Right before she hung up, she told me to curl up on the couch...right in the spot where I was...and go to sleep. "Things always look better in the morning, with a new sunrise and a fresh start."

Little did either of us know how right she was.

The next day was July 7, 1993. The day was hot. The day was sticky. The day was the day my life changed.

That afternoon around 4:00, I went for my daily run. There was a thunderstorm "brewing" off in the distance. Big black clouds were on the horizon and the wind was beginning to whip the leaves up off the pavement. The sun would peek through the clouds occasionally, and random drops of rain would escape from the sky.

I rounded a corner and began the last mile of my run, down a long and congested street. Cars were whizzing by and the wind was really picking up.

When something very mysterious and beautiful began to happen.

I began to run really fast. The sounds of the traffic disappeared. I could hear my heart beating in my chest like the pounding of a loud drum. I could feel the soles of my feet lightly tapping the cement sidewalk under my feet. I smelled the hot summer pavement, fresh with wet rain. I felt the sweat from my effort, roll down the sides of my face, down my chest and down my back.

And then, it happened.

The "Girl Box" lifted right off of my shoulders. I had this sensation like I had left my body and was looking down at myself running. And who I saw, was the most beautiful woman in the world. She was vibrant. She was fun. She was real.

And she was ME!

I felt, for that moment, what you, and I, and all of the women of the world are capable of feeling...the most intense joy possible, because I was free of the suffocating "Girl Box." I rediscovered the girl I had left behind in sixth grade. For the first time since sixth grade, I felt comfortable in my skin.

I cried, right there on that busy street, and realized that I was crying tears of joy...something I had never done. I realized that to be a content girl, I needed to get out of that "Girl Box" and do everything I could to help girls either get out of the dreaded box, or better yet, NEVER GO IN!

That's where YOU come in. Three years later I started *Girls on the Run*. In 1996, I wrote the first set of lessons, tried them out with a group of girls at Charlotte Country Day School and the rest is history.

That's why this book is for you. I started *Girls on the Run* in an effort to help you feel like you never have to go into the "Girl Box." But what I've learned over the course of the last 10 years, since I started *Girls on the Run* is this; I think YOU know more about how to stay out of the "Girl Box" than I do, because you aren't in it yet.

You just aren't old enough to see it. Remember that word **perspective**? Older people have the privilege of having perspective from the simple fact that we are older. You can't really have perspective until you've lived a good number of years.

So what I thought would be cool...would be if we made a deal. Since you and all of your girlfriends in *Girls on the Run* have taught me so much

about how to stay out of the "Girl Box" over the last several years, I thought my gift back to you...would be to add **perspective** to it. This means I will put it all together in some kind of sensible sequence so you can look at what you've taught me, from my adult point of view.

This way you can practice the things you are doing NOW, that keep you out of the "Girl Box"...so that you actually NEVER GO IN!!!

This book has a total of eight chapters: this one and seven more. Chapters 2 through 7 are the six insights you have given me...small tasks that if performed daily will keep you out of the "Girl Box"...for the rest of your life! I learned these by watching you and hearing what you do to stay true to the very cool person that you are, right now!

The eighth chapter is a summary chapter and puts chapters 1-7 into perspective. (I'll be using that word a lot!)

So.....girlfriend!

Are you ready?

All right then. Fasten that seat belt and let's get this party started!