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opening extract from

Being a Girl

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Chapter One

BEING A *girl*



As a teenager, I remember feeling that the world seemed designed to keep me in my place. The media, and even most adults, didn't seem particularly interested in young people or in what we had to say. But learning that I could rely on myself made dealing with everything else easier. I imagine growing up today might be even more complicated. Now that the media *are* focusing on youth and teenagers, they do it with laser-like intensity. But while marketers chase the fountain of youth, I'd like to concentrate on another resource—one you should never lose sight of. It's not anything you can find in a perfume bottle, a Gap ad, or even a Manolo Blahnik shoe. In fact, it's not available in stores at all. It's called *self-esteem*, and it comes from within you.

Self-esteem is more than just feeling good about yourself. It's the glue that holds you together when things get uncomfortable or tough. It's a way for you to learn from your mistakes and to trust your gut when it's time to make a decision. Building self-esteem is a process that is never really finished. The key word is "self." It's got to come from you. When I think about what has kept me going, two thoughts come to mind: BELIEVE IN YOURSELF and YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

ME AT 14, THE YEAR I ACTED WITH THE COURTENAY SUMMER THEATER ON VANCOUVER ISLAND.

When Bad Things *Do* HAPPEN



Unfortunately, few (if any) of us will get through life without encountering events of staggering sadness.

My parents' breakup when I was seventeen was a very sad time for me. The world as my family had known it had come to an end. My parents could no longer pretend to be happily married. They were tired of not getting along, and the endless arguments and hurt feelings eventually became too painful. We children had to come to terms with the new arrangement.

Because my father traveled often for work, he had been absent for long stretches throughout my childhood. So, at first, the dreaded divorce wasn't as painful as my siblings and I had feared. But everything changed when my parents began to date other people. Suddenly, Dad was seeing the dental hygienist in town, and Mom was with a guy in the Air Force. They both wanted us kids to approve of their new relationships, but we couldn't comprehend our parents being with anyone but each other. I suppose hating these "strangers" made it possible to believe it was their fault our parents were no longer together. I also felt that I could change my parents' decision to separate by being a better daughter. It was a crushing disappointment to realize that no matter how good I tried to be or how proud they were of me, they were never getting back together.

Everyone deals differently with being sad or depressed. My way was to try to sweep it under the rug and work as hard as I could at my acting. This behavior has a name—it's called *denial*, and it will bite you in the butt sooner or later, if you don't look at what's happening and acknowledge it.

Letting Go of **Anger**

It took several years for me to get to my anger and my feelings so I could grieve about my parents' divorce. Only after doing that could I begin to heal and find small comforts that didn't betray or deny my sense of loss. I wish I hadn't held in my feelings so long.

Here are some things you should keep in mind when you're working through a difficult time in your life:

IT'S OK TO CRY. I wish that I'd cried sooner. Bottling up my sadness only made it worse.

FEEL THE ANGER. I should have punched more pillows and really released my frustrations. That way, I could have avoided venting on myself or people around me.

REACH OUT. My siblings, girlfriends, or my parents could have been there to help me deal with my feelings, as difficult as it might have been for them. And maybe they could have used my help, too.

