The Girl Guide

From The Girl Guide: Finding Your Place in a Mixed-Up World
by Christine Fonseca © 2013, Prufrock Press
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Gabby Douglas, Kyla Ross, Adzo Kpossi, Missy Franklin—what do these amazing athletes of the 2012 Olympics have in common? They are all girls 17 and under. Together with lesser known teens, they have redefined the image of young, strong, and accomplished girls for generations to come. Each one of them has learned to set goals, overcome adversity, and focus on their dreams.

Which is where this book comes in.

More than a book about growing up strong, *The Girl Guide: Finding Your Place in a Mixed-Up World* is all about finding your own unique place in the world, your authentic voice.

Now, I know that life can be hard. There are expectations from everyone to act a certain way, fill a certain role. There are even expectations about *not* listening to those who tell you how to act. Sometimes there are things that happen that send your life spiraling out of control, things you can’t foresee. Sometimes you make bad choices that lead to horrible consequences, throwing you completely out of balance. And sometimes it feels like all of the dreams you had when you were a young child move out of reach as you get older.
Maybe you feel like you have to fit in with a certain group and act a certain way just to secure your future. And maybe you think you have to “buck the system” because that’s what it means to be strong.

Guess what? Strength and resiliency are actually something different. They’re about making your own definition of your life. They’re about exploring your options, developing your talents, and not allowing the various barriers life may throw your way stop you from achieving your dreams.

And they’re also about allowing those dreams to morph and change just as you grow and develop.

My hope for you as you read this book is that you begin to hear and listen to the voice deep inside—the one that holds your authentic self. The one that is already confident and secure.

In the following pages you’ll read stories and strategies for cultivating your own unique self. You’ll read about girls who have overcome the odds and achieved more than was expected. You’ll get strategies and projects that will help you discover your own unique voice in this crazy, noisy world!

Starting On Your Personal Journey

This book was designed to be used as a guide, a workbook, and a source of inspiration. Each part starts with an introduction and short quiz. Take the quizzes often, as your answers will change over time. Each chapter contains a What Would You Do? scenario that brings the concepts into the real world, and a Note to Self section that shares some advice from other strong young women and successful adults who have found their unique voices.
Additionally, the chapters include quotes from other teens, tools (not rules) to help guide you on your quest, and activities to help you redefine normal for yourself. My hope is that you will use this book as you need it—and use it often.

**Things You May Need**

The activities, quizzes, and worksheets throughout the book can be completed in many ways. They can be done in the book if you’d like. One particularly helpful tool is a journal. These can be the little journals you use for school or something bigger. You can do the activities and worksheets in the journal so you can create your own personal memoir of this journey toward your authentic self.

Other useful items include index cards, glue sticks, pictures, colored pencils or pens, and anything else you can use with the various activities to make them your own. You can even take the activities into the digital age, using Photoshop, Pinterest, Glogster, video software, and more. Remember, this journey is all about you—so be as creative as you want to be.

**Adding Your Voice**

If you find this book helpful to you and want to offer up your own story or tools for other young women, please do! I’m always looking to bring more advice, tools, and inspiration to girls just like you. Just e-mail me at christine@christinefonseca.com, and share your stories. It’s one of the best ways to give back to others.
A Word to Parents

Growing up is a challenging job—and growing up strong and resilient in today’s fast-paced and turbulent world can be even more challenging. That’s where this book comes in. Packed with quotes, stories, and life tools, The Girl Guide: Finding Your Place in a Mixed-Up World is designed to help girls find their own unique voice in our chaotic and often noisy world.

The Girl Guide focuses on the principles of resiliency, including social acceptance, self-efficacy, and emotional balance. Additionally, it provides specific strategies and tools for some of the more common issues facing girls today, including relational aggression, staying safe online, school performance, social adjustment, and the mother-daughter connection.

Use this book to address various concerns as they come up. Or read it first and then share it with your girls. Either way, be sure to talk about the information and advice with your teens. Use the ideas as a springboard to open the lines of communication. And if you find something particularly helpful, shoot me a note and let me know.

I wish you much success in being the coach your girls need as they progress through their years and embrace everything it means to be strong young women.
Understanding how to develop your authentic self begins with understanding who you are in the first place. The upcoming chapters discuss how to discover what it means to be “you,” including your strengths and difficulties. The worksheets and quizzes give you the tools to discover your strengths and opportunities for growth, establish goals, and develop healthy lifestyle choices that can put you on a path toward your dreams.

The chapters also begin to delve into the concept of resiliency. Defined by Merriam-Webster as “the ability to recover or adjust to change,” the attributes of resiliency can make the difference between falling short of your goals and learning to pick yourself up and push through the hard times.

Before we begin the journey toward your authentic selves, I’ve got a little quiz to get you thinking about your own authenticity. Answer the five true/false questions before reading through this section.
My Journey Begins

1. I know how to set goals that are responsible and measurable.
   - True  - False

2. I think it is more important to be myself than to have a lot of friends.
   - True  - False

3. I practice healthy habits like getting enough sleep and eating properly most days.
   - True  - False

4. I understand the importance of exercising and being relaxed.
   - True  - False

5. I have a good sense of my strengths, as well as the areas I need to improve.
   - True  - False

Come back and retake the quiz anytime you feel a little disconnected from yourself. Then revisit the activities and tools presented in the chapters, just to refine your skills.
Chapter 1

It’s My Life

Every journey begins with a map and supplies, including an inner journey. And you can’t create a map until you know where you are right now and where you would like to go. Over the next several pages, you are going to learn how to determine where you are and begin to make your supply list of what you may need on the journey toward your authentic self. But first, let’s start with a little scenario.

The best advice I’ve ever received? Be yourself. If someone else doesn’t like it, that’s on them. You just worry about being true to who you are. —Maya, age 16
What Would You Do?

You have a lot on your plate—school, sports and other extracurricular activities, taking care of your little sisters while your parents work. It’s a lot of responsibility. You’re tired, stressed, and always feel like you are fighting off a cold.

After several months of this grueling schedule, you really want to talk with your parents about lightening your load a little bit. But you don’t want to disappoint anyone. Nor do you want to sound like a burden to them.

What do you do? Tell your parents how you feel? Suck it up and just deal with your schedule, regardless of how you feel? Let yourself get sick and have your physical health communicate your needs? Just drop out of things without telling anyone?

Take a moment and write down what you would do to navigate through this challenging situation.
Who Am I?

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, starting on a new journey begins with a map. And the only way to create a map is to know both where you are and where you want to go. Easier said than done at times.

It’s hard to really understand who you are at your core. Sure, you can look into a mirror and make judgments about your looks. You can use words like tall or short, blond or brunette, lean or heavy, as ways to describe what you look like. But these descriptions only involve your physical attributes, not the essence of “you” inside.

Now, I’m not saying that physical form isn’t important. I would be lying if I told you that human beings don’t make judgments about you based on physical attributes. And there are a lot of books and magazines that address the latest fashion and beauty trends. But not this book.

This book is about going deeper, beyond the physical descriptions we may use for ourselves and into the inner attributes that shape how we act and the decisions we make.

It has to do with the you on the inside.

How do you get to know her? How do you discover that authentic self and make a place for her in the world? Those are the questions we will explore in this book.

It starts with taking stock of some of the personality attributes you may have. Things like whether or not you enjoy school, the types of friends you enjoy, and your hobbies. Take a look at the Who Am I? worksheet and work through the various attributes listed, indicating which ones describe you and which ones do not.
**The Girl Guide**

**Worksheet #1: Who Am I?**

**Directions:** Take a moment and read each statement, indicating if you agree or disagree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>I agree</th>
<th>I disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I’m a good listener.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People say I am fun to be with.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a lot of friends.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to be active.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I prefer reading to most sports.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would rather draw than read.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math is my favorite subject.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am a strong student.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy spending time with my family.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When my friends and I argue, I am usually the one to make things better.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I am mad, I stay mad for a long time.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do my homework on time most nights.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to be involved in a lot of activities.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now, take a moment and write a few words or sentences to describe yourself based on those attributes.
This list is by no means exhaustive. It is merely a starting point. After you’ve worked through the list, take a few minutes to write a description of yourself in your journal or at the end of the worksheet. Try to stay away from any physical descriptions of yourself and focus on the core attributes of the inner you. Think, too, about your quirks, habits, and things that make you unique. For example, one girl I spoke with said she loves to analyze everything, making literal analyses about nonliteral statements—all as a way to drive her friends a little crazy. It is her own unique quirk and something her friends identify as completely her.

Once you have a good, working description for who you are right now, begin the next section and start to plot out where you want to go.

Dream Big

Although you certainly don’t need to have a destination in mind when setting off on an exciting journey, it is helpful if you have some idea as to the direction you’d like to go in. With inner journeys, that means having some idea as to your future dreams.

When developing your dreams, there are no limitations. Don’t let an inner voice of doubt get in the way of your fantasies. Don’t think about the barriers that could prevent you from the dreams. Don’t limit yourself in any way. There will be time to manage the dreams and deal with making them realistic, but not here. Not now.

This is the opportunity to explore all of the possibilities of your life. Eleanor Roosevelt and Anaïs Nin are both known for their ability to inspire. They spoke of living a courageous life, of dreaming and achieving.
Dreaming unabashed takes courage. But so does living an authentic life.

To help you get in touch with your deepest dreams, I’ve included a little activity designed to release your inner dreamer. Remember, the best way to approach this is without your inner editor—the voice that tells you all of the reasons why you can’t achieve something. There is a place for that voice of reason, but not yet. Not here.

*I really want to open a cupcakery one day. I’ve got a menu all picked out, an idea of my logo, and even some idea of I’d want my store to look. Next, I’m going to research how to get started. Why not, right? What have I got to lose? —Erika, age 12*

Take some time and really explore all of the crazy, wild things you would one day like to do and then do the Dream Poster activity. Repeat this activity often, as you will find that your dreams will expand as you begin to fully embrace the inner you. You might even set up a bulletin board for your dreams in your room—something you can change easily and often as your goals and dreams change.

One more important note—sometimes it is really hard to hear your inner voice and get in touch with your dreams. Maybe your life is filled with hardship. Maybe you have to deal with situations that make dreaming of a happy life really difficult. Maybe you are too bound by expectations and other things to even know what you want for yourself.

In these cases, I still want you to try to make a dream poster. Make your first poster about the expectations, if that is what quiets that inner voice. Or pretend you are someone else, and make a poster about that person’s dreams. Just try the activity.
Dream Poster

1. Using your journal or something similar, list some of the things you like to do.

2. Find or draw pictures that reflect your list. For example, if you like to paint and draw, maybe find a picture of an artist’s easel.

3. Make a collage of the pictures.

4. Under the collage, write a goal for your self—something you would like to achieve.

5. Date the collage.

6. Every few months, reflect back on the collage. Do you need to add to it? Or make a new collage?

7. Try to keep a current collage of your dreams and goals to serve as a reminder of where you want to go!

8. For even more fun, use PowerPoint, Photoshop, Glogster, or similar technology to "create" a collage of you living your dream. Import this collage to your phone, tablet, or any place you can see it daily.

9. DREAM BIG!
Learn to listen for that inner voice. Sometimes it will come while you sleep. Sometimes it will be nothing more than a random thought or whisper. And sometimes it’s merely you noticing a color or song that you like. Pay attention to these hints of the you that lives within. Eventually she will make herself known to you. As you begin to pay attention to her, she will guide you to parts of yourself that have been silent.

The Journey

Now that you have the beginnings of a definition of where you are and where you would eventually like to go, it’s time to map out a path to get there. What’s one way to do this? Goals.

When setting goals, it is important to both set the overall goal and determine how you might achieve the goal—the baby steps needed to go in the right direction.

Now, this may seem a little daunting, especially if your dreams are big and fabulous. Never fear, this is still just an exercise in working toward your dreams. You don’t need to edit your aspirations or curtail the goals. This is just about learning how to walk in the direction of your dreams.

In the next worksheet, I want you to practice setting a few goals. For this exercise, I want you to set little goals that you can achieve over the next several weeks. The best goals are the ones that are clear; ones that you can measure in some way. The example I use in the chart is a small goal of “pass my math final.” It is a goal that can be achieved in a semester. It is measurable and clear.

In order to achieve my goal, there are a few steps I will need to do to get me to travel in the right direction. One is studying math nightly. Another could be reworking any errors I make on tests or
### Worksheet #2: Setting Goals

**Directions:** Think about the goals for each area, then create a plan and time frame for accomplishing each goal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Plan</th>
<th>Time Frame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| School Goal #1:       | - Study for 15 minutes a night  
                        | - Redo any problems on the quiz I got wrong  
                        | - Ask my teacher for help if I get confused        | 3 months   |
| Pass my math final    |                                                                                                 |            |

**School Goal #1**

**School Goal #2**

**Personal Goal #1**

**Personal Goal #2**

**Long-Term Goal #1**

**Long-Term Goal #2**
asking my teacher for help. Any of these ideas will help me move toward my goal of passing my math final.

In addition to determining activities needed in order to achieve the goal, it is helpful to establish a timeline. This is a way to hold ourselves accountable and not allow the day-in/day-out routines of life derail us on our journey.

Take some time and create some goals for school and home, using the goal-setting worksheet. Be sure to think about a few activities for each goal that can help you move toward achieving it. Revisit your goals regularly and adjust things as you and your dreams change.

Goal setting is something that takes a little practice, but can help frame and focus your life and help you achieve things you may not have ever thought possible. And goals can help give you a framework for your courage—they can help turn the big ideas you may have for your life into something manageable.

So practice writing small goals and develop this into a habit you can use when approaching some of the bigger goals you may have for your life.

Becoming a goal-writing/goal-following expert is a great way to help you continue on the journey toward your dreams. It enables you to experience small victories along the way. It’s important to celebrate these small victories. Life can be hard at times. There are more reasons to give up on your dreams than there are reasons to pursue them. But goals can help you stay focused and remember what it is you want to achieve.

And both goals and dreams can help you stay in touch with the inner you.
Note to Self: Work Hard

Success at anything takes hard work. Just because you’re good at something, or it’s your dream, doesn’t make you an automatic success at it. To truly succeed you have to push harder than is comfortable. Work longer than you want to. Experience setbacks and decide to keep going. It’s not something that’s easily won. It’s something you work at, again and again, because it matters to you. —Jessi Kirby

This chapter was just the beginning, a chance to experience some of your inner dreams and practice a particular strategy designed to help you as you begin to carve your own unique niche in the world.

As the opening scenario illustrated, sometimes we just take on too many things at once. Our dreams are big, the expectations we have for ourselves combine with the expectations others have, and we become overwhelmed by it all. In the next chapters, we will deal with managing expectations, setting boundaries, and developing resiliency. But before that, I want you to reflect on that opening
scenario once more and think about the dream poster and goals you established when working on the activities in this chapter. Then look over the following self-reflection exercise.

My Voice

Keeping in mind the authentic you inside, answer the following:

- How can I use my dreams and goals to help me balance out what people expect from me?
- Do the expectations I hold for myself line up with the dreams I have?
- Are there adjustments I need to make to my expectations or the things I am involved in based on my inner voice?