

CHOOSING HAPPINESS

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Lizzie Velasquez



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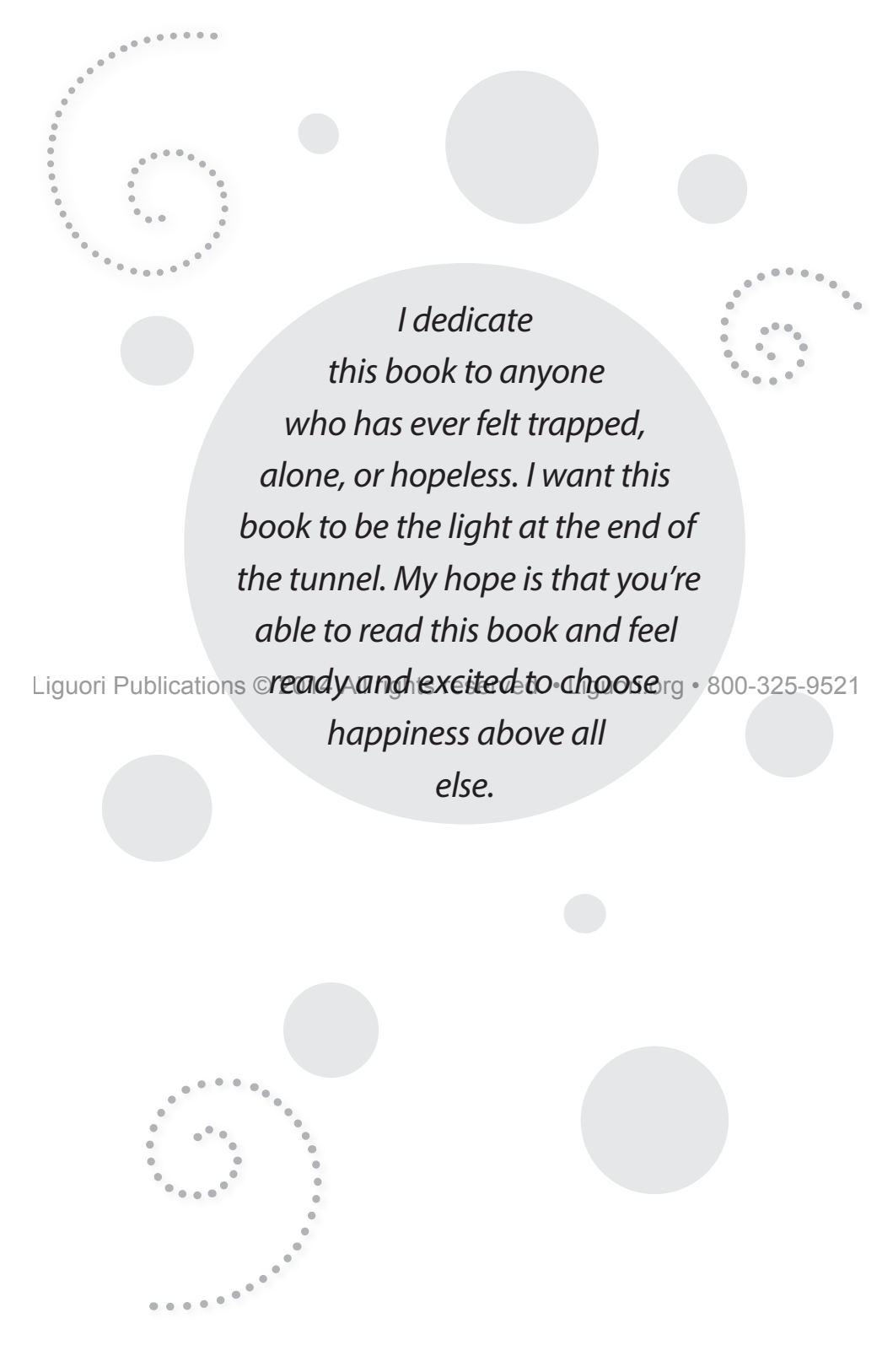
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First Edition

The background is white and features several decorative elements: solid gray circles of various sizes and dotted gray spirals of varying radii, some of which are partially cut off by the edges of the frame. A large, light gray circle is centered on the page, containing the dedication text.

*I dedicate
this book to anyone
who has ever felt trapped,
alone, or hopeless. I want this
book to be the light at the end of
the tunnel. My hope is that you're
able to read this book and feel
ready and excited to choose
happiness above all
else.*



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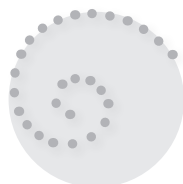
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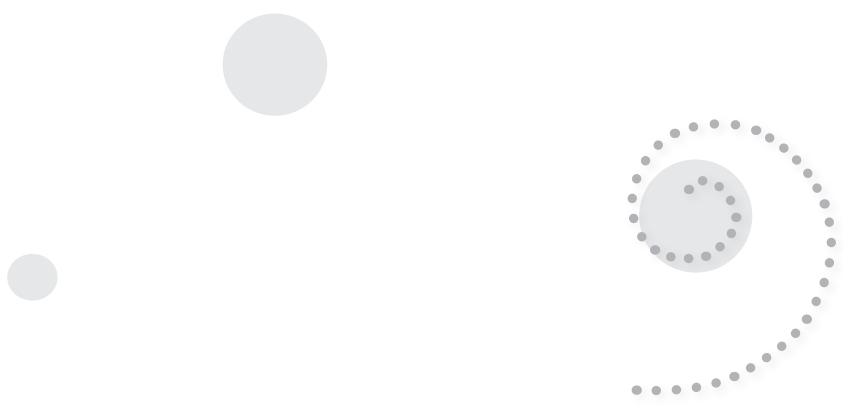
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Foreword

I have always described myself as an adventure junky. Like a wolf in sheepskin, I've always been a daredevil in a big-haired, big-dimpled, Southern belle's body. My passion for jumping out of airplanes, hiking the most dangerous terrains on earth, swimming with sharks, and volunteering to survive on deserted islands was inevitably a desire to challenge myself and to step outside my comfort zone, most of which I have done with very few fears getting in my way.

That being said, few things have intimidated me as much as when my sweet Lizzie called and asked me to write the foreword to her book. Immediately I was *terrified* that I would do this girl (who I astronomically admire) no justice whatsoever. I was afraid that my words would fail me and only a blank cursor would stare back at me from my computer screen. Yet in the midst of all that insecurity, it dawned on me that THIS is the kind of new frontier, THIS is the crazy adventure (exponentially scarier than any I've ever been on) that Lizzie is daring us to go on. In fact, the *real* daredevil is the person with enough courage to define herself in a world begging for us to conform to everyone else, not the person jumping out of a plane with a perfectly good parachute on her back!

Now, I can't help but reference the first Skype call I ever had with Lizzie. I was in San Fran, she was at home in Austin, and I had read all about her, watched some of her videos online, and (I'm being candid here) was trying my best not to fan-girl her. One of my best friends (Sara Bordo) and I were producing the first TEDxAustinWomen conference, and my job was to convince Lizzie

that she wanted to speak at it. I'll spare you the suspense. She said "yes" and gave the talk of her life. In fact, her TEDx talk went viral, and—as I write in April 2014—has more than 9.5 million views!! I'm sure it'll be closer to twenty or a hundred million by the time this book makes it into your hands. I knew I fell in love the moment I met her, but what makes Lizzie so mesmerizing to others?

Among so many things, it's her sense of humor that keeps me fully entertained, her resilience that keeps me in awe, her faith, her grace, and her humility that—when all combined—melts people's hearts. Yeah, Lizzie has a syndrome, blah, blah, blah. The difference is that we could all start our life story with an excuse: an excuse to not live full out, an excuse to not achieve our dreams, an excuse to blame others instead of taking responsibility for our lives. THAT is what Lizzie is here to teach us, to not let others, the world, or even ourselves, label us in ways that don't serve us, in ways that limit us.

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I tell people that if the Lord really does place angels among us, then the jig is up, because I already know Lizzie couldn't possibly be human! Lizzie's magnanimity in the face of bullying, in the face of hate, in the face of evil is nothing short of divine. I now (along with Sara) have the privilege to help share her story in a documentary we're making about her life. This book, the last two, and the ten more I'm sure she will write are all here to help guide us to be better humans and to have the courage to turn our adversity and insecurity into our greatest assets and strengths.

Lizzie may be my surrogate baby sister, but she is also my mentor, one of my dearest friends, and a true light bearer on this earth. It is a privilege to say: "That one there, she's mine." It's my honor to watch Lizzie shine, to witness her inspire that same resplendence in others, giving us all permission to be remarkable.

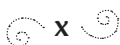
My sweet Lizzie, all BEAUTIFUL you are, there is no flaw in you.
It is an honor to be in your corner my dear. I love you so much,
and I cannot wait to see what kind of mountains we will move. XO

Alexis Whitney Jones

Founder, I Am That Girl

Author/activist/media personality

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Introduction

If someone would have told me a year ago that my second book would be number six on the iTunes top Christian books list, I'd be filmed for major television networks all over the world, I would finally finish my bachelor's degree in communication studies, and I'd start taking the reins of my own career—all by the age of twenty-four—there's no way I would have believed it. If I had been told I would be on a plane with my dearest and best friend headed for the vacation of a lifetime in Maui, Hawaii, I wouldn't have believed it. Sometimes I don't feel worthy of everything that's happening to me. I'm just a girl telling her story, I'm just dorky Lizzie, and I have people telling me I'm their hero. It's like I have two separate lives. In one life I'm just this silly girl who got called names and decided to be happy. In the other life I'm telling other people how to be happy and changing their lives. It's surreal.

But not everything that happened in 2013 was surreal in a good way. If someone had said I'd get a call from my dad on my second day in Hawaii saying my mom was going into septic shock after surgery gone wrong and was being rushed into emergency surgery as we spoke, I—without a doubt—wouldn't have believed it. I wouldn't want to believe that one.

But I can tell you, every single one of those things happened to me. With love, faith, sadness, and confusion, I'm here to tell you yet again that yes—impossible as it seems—all those events happened in 2013.

As some of you may know, I'm no stranger to being put in the position of having to make a decision between two things: choosing happiness or choosing to give up. Living every single

day with a syndrome that plenty of people in the world find ugly is something I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy. Luckily, God knew what he was doing when I was born, and he sent me to the two most amazing parents in the world. They unintentionally taught me that no matter what obstacle life puts in front of me, choosing happiness is the only way. Even when I wake up in the morning and I'm dreading having to deal with the ridicule of the outside world, I remind myself of how blessed I am just to have a warm bed to wake up in every morning. How can I wake up grumpy in my big, queen-sized, comfy bed with my little puppy, Bitsy, lying right by my side?

Over the last year, things have happened in my life I never would've expected. Almost losing my mom while I was a seven-hour plane ride away from her was one of the hardest things in the entire world. My family and our faith grew enormously over those months and will continue to grow during the long months of recovery my mom has ahead of her. As a family we've had to really pull together and simply make things work. We had to choose to be happy and to stay strong for our mom because that's what she would do if it were the other way around.

I have learned so many unexpected, difficult, emotionally and mentally draining lessons this past year. But I have also learned that I have grown into a young-adult woman who, despite only weighing about as much as a third-grader, can handle life's obstacles on her own. I know what I deserve and am realizing just what kind of woman I was meant to be. It's been an interesting journey during this past year, on top of an already interesting twenty-four years of life with this...let's just call it "unknown syndrome" for now.

I hope all of the lessons I've learned, the trials I've conquered (or am currently conquering), the growth I've experienced, and the sometimes difficult choices I've had to make can somehow help or relate to you on some level. That's why I wanted to write

another book. The obstacles might keep coming, but with a lot of faith in God and myself, I can keep beating them. And you can beat your challenges, too! Not only have I included stories of my own life I hope you can learn from (or laugh at), I've also tried to show that what I've gone through, even though it's individual to me, really is relatable to all of you.

Within each chapter, you'll find activities to strengthen your self-esteem and, hopefully, learn a little more about yourself. At the end of each chapter you'll find reflection questions and some blank space for you to write your answers and also what you learn during your day. There's also room to write your thoughts about my comments—or anything else you want to say—on the "Get Out and Do It" pages. If you need more room to write, go out and get a journal or some blank paper and just keep going!

If there's one thing I've learned as I've grown up, it's that there's always room for change. You don't have to be the person other people tell you to be, you don't have to be the person you were a year ago. Life's a journey we should all enjoy. The destination doesn't matter. Whether you're a reader who's growing up with me, a new reader who picked up the book because you liked the cover, or someone who has gotten this book as a gift, I hope you can use my experiences to gain a little confidence in your own life. Whatever you're going through, wherever you are, there's just one thing I want you to know: You're not alone.

No matter where we come from, what we go through, what language we speak, or what we look like, we all have two choices when faced with any situation.

Will you choose happiness? Or will you choose to give up?

Lizzie Velasquez

September 23, 2013

CHAPTER I

Growing Up — Finding Joy in the Journey

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Rather, living the truth in love, we should grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament with the proper functioning of each part, brings about the body's growth and builds itself up in love.

EPHESIANS 4:15–16

The Journey to Independence

The apostles gathered together with Jesus and reported all they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while."

MARK 6:30–31

Filling out college applications, getting recommendation letters, looking up dorm-room décor during my free time, all these things and more consumed my life the second half of my senior year in high school. The thought of having everything be completely different: a change in scenery, new people, a new room—new everything, really—was so exciting to me. I applied to four different colleges. I wanted to get in to all of them, of course, but after being denied by two schools and wait-listed for my top choice, all of my college daydreams started to fade away.

I remember when I received my last letter. The last letter from the last school I applied to. I was standing in the kitchen with my parents. You could feel the anticipation in the air. It took a few minutes of convincing from my mom and dad before I felt ready to open that letter. This was the letter that would decide my fate, my future. I wasn't ready to find out if I was never going to college, or if the fourth time was the charm. The envelope was thick, like it had a packet in it. I took that as a good sign, considering all the other letters I received were just one piece of paper with the words: "Dear Elizabeth, I'm sorry to inform you...."

Once I finally built up the courage to tear open the envelope, I can't tell you how relieved I was to see the words: "Welcome to Texas State!" I don't even remember reading the entire letter! I

threw my arms up and started jumping up and down and running around our kitchen. I felt like the world was lifted off my shoulders that instant because I knew I would be going to college! My parents were just as excited as I was. We were all hugging and laughing and enjoying every second of that monumental moment.

Of the four schools I applied to, the only one where I was accepted also happened to be the only one not in Austin. Would I actually be moving away from the house I'd lived in since I was two years old? Would I be able to do it on my own?

Being on your own is scary regardless of what else is going on in your life. Draw a line down the center of a sheet of paper. In the first column, write what scares you about being on your own. In the other, write something you could learn from getting over that fear.

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Here's mine:

Doing dishes

My syndrome can't stop me!

Being away from my parents

Coming up with solutions on my own

Being away from my friends

Meeting new friends, trying new things

Failing in college

Challenging myself and learning how I learn

Failing at my career

Finding out ways I can be even better

During the application process, my dad—being the overprotective parent he is—actually offered to pay me to go to school in Austin and stay at home. He said he would pay me every month as long as I lived at home. (I told him he might be late on some payments, and we can't have that! Joking of course....) The offer was tempting, I mean, getting paid just to stay at home! Some people would find that an offer you couldn't pass up. But in the end I knew it wasn't for me. I thanked my dad for his kind (and sneaky) offer, but it was time for me to leave the nest and fly away. Despite needing my parents' help for most of the things in my life because of my syndrome (not to mention being a kid until just recently), I was independent in every aspect of my life that I could be. I was more than eager to take on this next huge chapter of my life, with all the determination and stubbornness I had infused in my little body.

Out of my close group of friends, I was the only one leaving town for college. Granted, I'd only be moving about twenty minutes away, to San Marcos, but it was still going to be a big change for the group of girls who had been attached at the hip since we were eleven years old. Luckily, it wasn't just my friends who were going through the process with me. My cousins, Nikki and Anna, were applying for colleges, too, and (drum roll, please) Anna was accepted to Texas State!

Anna and I were going to be going to the same school! While my family knows I can take care of myself, having Anna at Texas State made them more relieved than anything. Not only would I be going to college with one of my best friends, I'd also have a close relative nearby in case of a medical emergency or anything else bad that might happen. Anna and I decided right away that we wanted to be roommates. We ended up being placed in our top pick, Jackson Hall, right on top of the hill by the student union. Among some of its other features, Jackson Hall has a giant light-up

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star on the roof that gets lit every time Texas State wins a football game. Now that Anna and I knew we'd be living in our first-choice dorm, all that was left was to wait for move-in day.

The night before I moved to Texas State was unreal, to say the least. All of my clothes, shoes, books, and supplies were packed in brown boxes and clear plastic tubs, not to mention all the memories with my family and best friends I was mentally packing to take with me, too.

I have a confession to make: While we kids were growing up, my parents never really made us do chores. My dad never allowed me to do the dishes because my vision isn't too great, and he was worried I would cut myself. While I normally don't like being told I can't do something because of my syndrome, I milked that one! I mean, there's no way anyone would argue with that rule! Am I right? Now, however, I was thrown into a situation where I not only had to wash my own dishes, but wash them by hand, too!

Not only did I go to college lacking the dishwashing skills I'd need, I also came without knowing another basic task, one that's probably a little more relatable to other college students out there. Laundry. I had no clue where to even begin. In my mind, I was somehow going to both shrink all my clothes and dye everything I owned pink. As if that wasn't intimidating enough, the laundry room in my hall was all the way in the basement. The spooky basement. I felt like I was starring in a scary movie every time I went down there alone.

The first time I did my laundry, I dragged my huge laundry basket downstairs. I called my mom. After hearing her explain to me how to separate by colors, how to use hot and cold water, and all the other details that come with washing clothes, I was over it. I had lost all interest in this part of being on my own. It took almost two hours, and the whole time I stayed in the basement, anxiously awaiting the loud buzzer indicating it was time to take

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my clothes out. I just knew once that sound went off I was going to open the top of the machine to see all of my clothes ruined. What I did see when I opened the dryer door was something I hadn't imagined. By some miracle, I had successfully done my first load of laundry without ruining anything! I called my mom, sent her pictures, and there might have been a mini-dance party to celebrate my still-intact clean clothes. It's the small victories in life that mean the most.

In addition to doing laundry and washing dishes, there was another practical aspect of living on my own I had to learn to deal with. Due to my bad vision, I've never been able to drive. Having to depend on other people to drive me places has been, and always will be, one of my biggest annoyances in life. I'm independent in so many aspects of my life that it's hard for me to not have control over the driving situation. Just imagine it. Always having to ask and plan ahead anytime you want to go somewhere. Not being able to just pick up and go when you want to. It really takes away the feeling of being free and independent.

Until I went to college, my parents were always the ones who drove me around, but the new friends I made at school all had their own cars, which meant freedom to go wherever we wanted at any time. Going for late-night runs at one in the morning to get tacos made me feel like I was the biggest rebel. My instinct was to tell my parents before I left or let them know when I got back, but now that I was on my own I didn't have to do that. I could just go.

With all this freedom to go where I wanted with my friends and no parents to tell me when it was time to get serious, it took me a few weeks to finally develop a routine. This routine consisted of staying up way too late attempting to do homework, studying, laughing and hanging out with my new friends—and waking up early for class hating myself for staying up so late the night before. Then, somehow, I made it through the day, usually with the aid

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of lots of coffee or candy. There were some mornings I would have a Reese's and Coke for breakfast. A breakfast of champions, in my opinion.

Besides all of the fun times and laughter with all of my "new college friends," as I called them, the most important reason why I was at school was to further my education. It was very easy to let my newfound freedom take over. I could've easily let having fun take center stage instead of going to class and doing my assignments. It took a lot of discipline and effort to find the right balance between friends, family, resting, and doing well in school.



Choosing to Be Independent

I have been an independent person my whole life. I don't like to be told I can't do something. In fact, I consider that a challenge. Tell me I can't do something and I'll find a way to do it on my own.

Even with that daredevil attitude, I was still a little nervous to leave home for college. Everything would be different. The people I relied on wouldn't be so close. My safety net wouldn't be there to catch me immediately if I fell. People wouldn't know my story like they did in high school. I really would be starting all over.

Starting over like that can seem impossible. But if you think about it, we've been taking steps toward independence our whole lives. The older we get, the steps just seem to get a lot bigger. I started kindergarten on my own. I didn't have any friends going there with me. I had to make friends when I got there, and it wasn't easy. I had to reestablish myself in middle school when my friends all split up to go to different schools again. I had to choose different activities to join and hope that I'd make friends when I got there. Then in high school I had to choose what activities to stick with and which ones to drop. I had to start taking steps toward

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my future career and getting into college. All of those times were scary. But think about the alternative.

What if we never choose independence? What if, instead of joining a club in high school—even though none of your friends are in it—you only do what your friends do? What if you give up on something you like because it isn't what everyone else is doing? What if you pass up the opportunity to go to your dream school because it's too far away from the people you care about? What if you pass on a job because it means you'll have to travel out of your comfort zone?

Saying “no” to all these opportunities doesn't sound like the best choice when you think about it, now does it? Being on your own can be scary when you're starting something new, but that doesn't mean the new thing isn't worth starting. Look back at your list of all the good things that come from getting over your fears.

You don't want to miss out on all those things, do you? The best thing that comes from being independent is experience. The experiences may not all be good. In school there were times I missed my family and wanted to go home. There are still times where I'm rushing from one speaking engagement to another where I feel like I just want to give up and hang out with my friends and family, where I don't want to be stressed and rushing all on my own. But I know I have to get past those feelings and do what I need to do. I have a mission and goals. I'd never be able to accomplish any of them if I didn't do things that scared me, things I had to go through alone.

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- ✿ I was nervous, but I did my own laundry.
- ✿ I was nervous, but I made it through college classes.
- ✿ I was nervous, but I wrote a book that was published.
- ✿ I was nervous, but I got in front of people and started speaking.

No one could have done those things for me. I had to embrace what scared me and choose independence. If I didn't, I'd never have made it to where I am right now.

But choosing independence doesn't mean you should be able to do everything on your own all the time. Being independent means knowing where to go for help and being able to ask people for help. It means knowing the difference between being independent and being stubborn. I may have done my own laundry, but I first asked my mom how to start. I graduated from college, but I asked my professors questions and studied with my classmates.

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Reflect



In what ways are you already independent?

In what ways are you still growing?

What can you do on your own? What do you need help with?

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Think of a time you needed help but didn't feel you could ask.

Why didn't you ask for help?

*What are some ways you could start being more independent
but are afraid to try?*

Go Out and Do It!



Learning to do my own laundry was really liberating. Find a skill you've always wanted to have and start working toward completion. Whether it's laundry, painting your room, or changing a flat tire, figure out who can help you and then go out and conquer it!

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The Journey to a New Me

*Let no one have contempt for your youth,
but set an example for those who believe, in
speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity.*

1 TIMOTHY 4:12

I went into my first week of college classes knowing the number of students in each class was going to be drastically different from what I was used to during my twelve years in elementary, middle, and high school. Going from a class size of twenty-five or less to a classroom of up to 300 students was very intimidating. In middle school and high school, I felt like I was a small fish in an average-size aquarium. In college, I felt like I was a tiny sea horse in a giant ocean. At times I would compare myself to the students who sat in the front row, the students who would answer or ask all the questions and be involved in the discussions during each lecture. The more I compared myself to them the more I thought I wasn't as smart as the other students. Those feelings of self-doubt are enough to make anyone freeze and consider giving up. But I didn't just have inner insecurities to worry about, and the more insecure I felt inside, the more I went back to my other, less confident self on the outside.

When I was in first grade, I was given my first monocular. It's like a pocket-size binocular, but it's only one small tube. I had to use it to help me see the board clearly from wherever I was sitting in the classroom. All of my friends thought my monocular was cool, but I wasn't a fan of it for many years. With lots of practice, the monocular became more and more helpful, and I became very dependent on the little guy. I could focus it, keep up with the

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teacher, and oftentimes hold it in a way that you couldn't even tell I was using it. When I got to college, the classrooms were in large lecture halls that put me even farther away from the teacher and the board. This would have been the perfect time for me to use the monocular, but I started to revert back to when I first got it. I was too embarrassed to use it during class. I felt like I stood out like a sore thumb enough, and I didn't want to draw any more attention to myself than necessary. Because I stubbornly refused to use my monocular, I had to suffer the consequences of messing up my notes and getting lots of migraines from eyestrain trying to see the board. All in hopes of looking "cool."

Eventually my stubbornness against using the monocular started affecting my grades negatively. I knew I had to bite the bullet and start using it again. After not using it for so long, it took a while to adjust. It wasn't fun having to readjust to using the monocular, but I'm so glad I did. If I hadn't given in, I'd have spent the rest of college having a hard time, getting migraines, and not learning anything. Besides, after I started using my monocular, no one in class stopped to tell me I looked lame or stupid.

This wasn't the only way I had to move out of my comfort zone either. Because of my syndrome, I have a very weak immune system, which means I had an excuse to have unlimited absences each semester. In college, some professors decide you can only have three absences per semester or it brings your final grade down. I had a letter that explained my situation, and I had to have it signed by each of my professors and turn it back into the Office of Disability on campus. Initially it felt awkward going to my professors to have them sign that piece of paper; just another way I had to be different. However, it actually turned into something that really helped me. Being in such large classes, it's sometimes hard for professors to have a one-on-one connection with every student. Since I had to get my letter signed the first day of class,

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I would wait until the lecture was over, go up to the teacher, and introduce myself. I would always put on my friendliest smile, explain my situation, and make sure to let the professor know that I was looking forward to the course. It not only established a connection, but it gave me a sense of belonging.



Choosing to Grow Up

While all these situations eventually worked themselves out, it was intimidating to have to learn to be comfortable in my own skin again. Through all the challenges I've had because of my syndrome, I've learned new ways to look at things. I'm appreciative of every moment I have, and I know everything I've gone through—or will have to go through—is a learning tool, a ladder that keeps me moving higher. That doesn't mean these obstacles are ever easy. It doesn't mean I never get annoyed with people staring at me or feel self-conscious about the way I look. Every new situation gives me another chance to overcome the labels, my appearance, and let people see me for who I am.

But who exactly is Lizzie? That question isn't as easy to answer as you might think.

In middle school, I really wanted to be a cheerleader, but not because I was athletic or had a passion for cheering. I just wanted the outfit. Partly because it was cute, but also because wearing that uniform meant I was part of something. It meant I fit in. I did end up making the varsity cheerleading team in middle school (so did every other person who tried out), and I thought that meant I fit in. If I dressed like everyone else, I felt I would look like everyone else. But that didn't happen. I had a lot of fun on the cheerleading team, but I also started to realize there were always going to be

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people who singled me out because of the way I looked. I had to make a choice, even at this young age, about whether I wanted to be miserable or happy.

I really did try to be happy. I put on a happy face at school and at home with my parents, anywhere people could see me. But at night, when I was taking a bath and getting ready for bed, I would cry. I'd let out all those emotions I tried to hide because I knew no one could see me. I'd plead with God, hoping that if I just scrubbed hard enough he'd wash my syndrome away, and I'd look in the mirror and see a normal face. That never happened. I was mad at God for a long time because of that, and in those moments—trust me—choosing happiness was not easy. In fact, some days it wasn't a choice I could make.

At that point in my life, I was dark, moody, teenage Lizzie. I was mad at the world and didn't know how to get better. But I knew that wasn't the person I wanted to be. That wasn't the Lizzie I wanted people to know me as. It wasn't the destination I wanted to end up at. So I started to listen to my friends and family and began to come to terms with who I was. Little by little, I started to tell God that if he wasn't going to make me pretty, then he had to show me why I had this syndrome and what good I was supposed to be doing.

Then I got to high school and found "that video" and felt like all the growing up I'd done went away. I wasn't as strong or as confident as I thought. I was still scared, insecure, and not only did I want to give up but I wanted to hurt other people the way I was hurting. This was another stage of my journey where I had to make a choice. I could turn into someone with more in common with my bullies than myself or I could find a way to rise above the pain. I could prove I wasn't what they said I was and do it in a way that was true to the person I wanted to be. It wasn't easy, but choosing happiness doesn't always mean choosing the easy route.



Not too long after that, I started speaking, and things started to fall into place. God's plan started to make sense. I finally started to accept that this was who I was, and that happy person was who I wanted to be. I started to like myself. I started to love myself. I started to be proud of who I was and what I looked like. I realized I actually could be comfortable in my own skin.

There are still days I have doubts and feel self-conscious, like using the monocle in my college classes or being afraid I won't be able to live on my own without my family support system. But I finally have an idea of who I'm capable of being, and to be that person I sometimes have to be brave. The older I get, the more I realize I have to take control of my own personality and my own definition of myself. My life was (and is) in my hands, just like your life is in your hands. You're the driver. You decide whether you go down a good path or a bad path. I decided to turn every hateful, nasty comment and stare into fuel to keep me working even harder and to look at every challenge as a new opportunity. You have the same choice.

Once I made that choice, everything else started to fall into place. I knew I wanted to go beyond what everyone else in the world thought of me and my appearance. I knew my mission was to get my story out there, to let people know you don't need to let your appearance or other people's negativity stop you. I knew I wanted to be a motivational speaker and help other people learn from my experiences. I wanted to be an author and a college graduate as well. Some day I want to have my own family and expand my career even further. But I don't want to be limited by just one label. I wanted to have them all, because we're all more than just one label. We are more than just what we're told we're good or bad at. We're more than our appearance, more than our limitations, more than our fears.

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There are lots of things I want to be and accomplish in my life, kind of like a personality bucket list of all the things I want to do or be. Take a minute and create one of your own. List all the things you've been and all the things you want to be in the future, and put a check mark by the things you've already accomplished. Don't limit yourself or worry that you can't do everything. You never know where life is going to take you, so don't limit the journey!

Lizzie's **Personality Bucket List**

- ☒ Cheerleader
- ☒ Writer
- ☒ Motivational speaker
- ☒ Daughter
- ☒ Friend
- ☒ Forgiver
- ☒ Optimist
- ☒ College graduate
- ☐ Founder of my own company
- ☐ Web designer
- ☐ Computer guru
- ☐ Wife
- ☐ Mother

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Figuring out who we are, or “growing up,” is an ongoing process. We’ll always be challenged and have bad days when we want to give up. The important thing is that we must never give in to those voices that tell us we can’t, whether those voices are from the outside or inside our own hearts. If there’s something you want to do, you can find a way to do it. Sometimes all it takes is being brave enough to start.

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Reflect



What is your mission in life?

*What do you know you want to do in the future?
(Or, what don't you want to do?)*

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What does it mean to you to be successful in your life?

How do you want other people to see you?



Go Out and Do It!



In the next few weeks (it doesn't have to be today), say "yes" to an opportunity you'd normally say "no" to and see what happens. If you're nervous, say a prayer or bring a friend, but don't give up. If you love it, great! If you hate it, find a way to use the experience to grow.

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