

EMBRACE YOUR FLAWS  
& OWN YOUR AWESOME

# Heroine

blaise hunter



LIFEWISE BOOKS

# Heroine

EMBRACE YOUR FLAWS & OWN YOUR AWESOME

By Blaise Hunter

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Published by:



PO BOX 1072

Pinehurst, TX 77362

[LifeWiseBooks.com](http://LifeWiseBooks.com)

Book Cover, Interior Layout and Design | Yvonne Parks | [PearCreative.ca](http://PearCreative.ca)

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ISBN (Print): 978-1-947279-52-0

ISBN (Ebook): 978-1-947279-53-7

# Dedication

## My Other Half - Robb

You are the air I breathe, and your love pulses through my veins. Thank you for loving me, flaws and all, and sharing your life with me. You are my safe place and together we create amazing things. Your dreams are my dreams.

#cahoots

## My Daughter - Lexi

You were the catalyst for this project. You opened my eyes and lit a fire within my soul. I want you to grow up strong and fierce, and know love conquers all. I did this all because of love. Love God, love yourself and let your love be felt around the world.

Shine bright, my sweet precious diamond.

## Myself

Blaise, I am so proud of you. You found freedom in your flaws and challenged yourself to draw from exquisite agony to transform your life. It is from that freedom you and others will heal. You are my heroine.



# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	7
Introduction	9
Chapter 1 - Learning to Fly	11
Chapter 2 - Sabotage	29
Chapter 3 - Self-Care	45
Chapter 4 - Heroine Generation	63
Chapter 5 - Bad Real Mom	79
Chapter 6 - Who Am I?	97
Chapter 7 - Fertility Schmertility	115
Chapter 8 - Let's Get Loud	143
Chapter 9 - Exposed	161
Chapter 10 - Be Here Now	219
Chapter 11 - Metamorphosis	235
About the Author	239
Endnotes	243
Works Cited	249



# Acknowledgements

Foremost, I offer my heartfelt thanks to the women who shared their hearts and souls with me and allowed vulnerability to prevail. Without you, this book wouldn't have been the same. It takes bravery and a true heroine spirit to offer your story and unmasked self to the world. Your willingness to be candid about the challenges you face as women and mothers truly inspired me and is deeply appreciated.

To Caitlyn Blake with Wild at Heart Photography: Thank you for giving your time, energy, and incredible talent to this project. I came to you with a vision, and you captured pure beauty with the concept. Your gifts and your passion touched the lives of these women and brought this book to life. It has been an honour to work with you.

To Joan Hunter: You saw me amidst the crowd and heard my cry. You listened to the Holy Spirit, spoke words of life over me, and told me I would write a book. This book wouldn't have happened without your tender heart and your obedience. Thank you for being the facilitator of my purpose.

To Charity Bradshaw: You were a divine appointment by God. Your mentorship, friendship, unwavering support, and

encouragement have meant more to me than you know. Thank you for following your soul's journey so I could follow mine.

To my editor and the entire LifeWise Books team: You took something that was raw and real and helped transform it into a polished diamond.

To my friends, family, and loved ones who said, "You can," in a world filled with, "You can't's": Thank you for the unwavering support.

To my Splurge Girls who truly are my backbone: Thank you. Together, we can survive motherhood.

Finally, to my Lord and Saviour: There was a time when I thought you had abandoned me, but I found refuge and solace in your love. I realized you carried me through my darkest moments, and when the time was right, you launched me forward and blessed me with a life filled with love and riches. Thank you for never forsaking me and taking me places I couldn't imagine.

# Introduction

“I have the perfect body, the perfect partner, and we make love three times a week. The laundry always gets folded and put away, my house is immaculate, my children cause me no worry, and I have so much energy I can cover all of the bases and still find time to do all my hobbies and take ‘me time’ every day,” said no mom, ever. The world is obsessed with perfectionism and correcting problems that were often never even problems to begin with. The perfect person or mom does not exist, but we strive to portray we have it altogether.

This book will take you on a journey of emotions to remove all of the masks of perfectionism and lead you onto a path of discovering we are all perfectly imperfect. Can you imagine yourself loving your body just as it is? Can you envision embracing every flaw so you can make room for mistakes and truly live your life? Do you want to believe “I am enough”? Join me on this journey that strips away the perfectionism mentality. Let’s get real and own who we are, flaws and all.

I am a woman who struggled with body image and guilt my whole life. One day, I decided that woman wasn’t who I wanted to be anymore. I looked at my precious little girl and wondered, “What can I do to ensure she doesn’t make the same mistakes I

did?” If we don’t learn from our actions, and change our habits, won’t our children be doomed to repeat them? I clawed my way out of a dark place to a new me; where I am enough, I am beautiful, and I am worthy.

I want to see every woman around the world find inner peace and joy. Together, we can spread the word and create a movement of acceptance and love. In this process, we don’t have to do anything other than take off the masks to uncover what already exists deep within us—true beauty.

The words you will read come from a place of pure honesty. I was never confident enough to own who I was. I have often been misunderstood and criticized for my unusual outlook on life. I have a deep faith and yet, I’m edgy and sassy. You may read this book and wonder, “Who is this girl?” I’m definitely a lot of things all woven together. I have depth, I have layers, and I look forward to sharing a piece of my heart with you. This book challenges us to be the best women we can be. My hope is, in the midst of our imperfections, we will transform our perceptions and no longer be blinded by untruths. We are heroine—Brave Woman.

# Chapter 1

## LEARNING TO FLY

### AH-HA MOMENT

Have you heard of the practice of cutting? It's a form of self-injury. This act involves someone literally making cuts on his or her own body. When you think of cutting, what words come to your mind? Pain? Self-harm? Abuse? You might be wondering what cutting has to do with being a heroine. What if I told you every time we think or speak negatively about ourselves, we are in essence, cutting our own souls? Would you take negative self-image more seriously? I know it's a harsh comparison, but negative self-esteem is a dangerous thing. We have downplayed the seriousness of it. Can you imagine your inner child looking in the mirror with scars and open wounds deep within? Will you consider changing your thoughts, knowing every time you feel fat, ugly, and not good enough, you are an active participant in self-mutilation? It's time we end the self-abuse. We need to put down the "knives" and see ourselves as heroines—brave women.

By embracing our flaws and owning our awesome, we truly embody the spirit of Heroine.

Low self-esteem followed me like a lost puppy throughout my life. I allowed it to chase me because deep down I believed the lie. I wasn't good enough. I was confident about certain things, but they were eclipsed by the side of me that didn't fully love myself. I knew I was fun, and my smile had the ability to light up a room, but I could still find ten faults for every good thing about myself. Instead of showcasing my strengths, I focused on what I thought were my weaknesses. Over time they consumed my every thought. It reminded me of the *Tale of Two Wolves*.<sup>1</sup> “*There are two wolves. One wolf is a wolf of love, peace, joy, harmony, and healing. The other wolf is of evil, hatred, misery, discord, and destruction. The fact is that these two wolves are not in a physical sense but are living inside of all of us. The one that we constantly feed is the one that wins.*”

So, which one of your wolves wins? Do your strengths overcome your perceptions of your weaknesses, or do you believe the lies? Which wolf wins? The answer is the same. “It's the one you feed the most.”<sup>2</sup>

My mom once told me she could pinpoint the exact moment in her childhood when her low self-esteem set in. She began the battle when a teacher told her to stop singing in her school choir, and instead she should just mouth the words. From that moment on, she felt like she had a terrible singing voice. Her confidence was shot. The instructor should have offered a word of encouragement or coached her on how to improve her voice. Instead, my mom experienced a completely different takeaway:

her voice shouldn't be heard. I think many of us can relate. Most women can identify a time when someone—usually a person in a position of authority in our lives—either encouraged or discouraged our abilities, pursuits, or simply who we were. Single moments of time in which we were either lifted up or torn down have had a major impact on how we feel about ourselves. These seemingly little pinpricks—self-confidence kickers—can happen in subtle ways, but generally we don't give them much thought until later in life. Growing up, I never once believed or said I had bad self-esteem. It took having a child to open the door to reflection. I could no longer turn a blind eye to the “cutting.”

In 2016, in an effort to improve my physical health, I started a journey of self-discovery. I never imagined the crazy, amazing, painful thoughts and feelings I would experience and the things I would learn about myself. During this time, I stumbled across a Facebook post written by a lady from Australia who was promoting a Netflix documentary she was making. The film, by Taryn Brumfitt, was called *Embrace*<sup>3</sup>. It focuses on embracing your body, as is. Just watching the trailer for the film inspired me. I wanted to renew my attention on self-esteem, to learn to love myself and my body as it was, not as I wished it could be.

Something switched in me that day. My thinking embarked on a transformation. I thought, “My little girl is perfect exactly the way she is. I would never want her to look in the mirror and think anything other than she is beautiful.” I suddenly realized what I was doing. If her mom, her role model, looks in the mirror and thinks, “Man, am I chubby today,” or, “Blaise, you have gained weight,” or, “That's it. I'm only having water all day today,” what hope do our future generations have? How can we expect our

children to grow up strong and confident if their mothers don't practice what they preach? I had an "ah-ha" moment as I realized it all starts with me. My voice will become her inner voice.

As I watched the documentary *Embrace*, I was shocked to learn all the ways I negatively think and talk about myself on a daily basis. I had been cutting my soul my entire life. We don't realize in all of those tiny moments, we do one of two things—we either uplift ourselves, or we poison our minds, bodies, and spirits with toxic thoughts and words.

I wish I could click my red heels together three times and make your negative thought life vanish in an instant, but I cannot. You have to do the hard work yourself. So, I challenge you to start a journal specifically related to your self-image. Don't get overwhelmed by this. Start with just one day. For that day only, record your responses when someone compliments you. Record what you say about food—to yourself or others. Record what you think about yourself when you look in the mirror. What are you thinking?

I was blown away by the number of times I put myself down, even slight or inadvertent put-downs, or made jokes at my own expense. When I began to add up all of those moments, I realized they weren't insignificant thoughts anymore. Instead, my whole day was being consumed with negative self-talk. I fed the abuse.

For example, when someone complimented me on how I looked, I said, "Oh thanks, I feel like I've gained weight." I felt uncomfortable when I got a compliment because I didn't feel pretty. I looked at other women in bikinis and thought, "Wow, she has an amazing body. I don't have that." I didn't even want to

hang out with those girls because my mind would scream with self-doubt and insecurities.

Before I had a kid, I had the time to do Zumba® three times a week. My love for Zumba® motivated me to work hard to get into shape. The upbeat Latin music, the friends I met, and the encouragement from the instructor all helped me to stay motivated. I ended up going to Cuba during that time and wore my bikini on the beach. Though I wasn't particularly self-conscious, I never really liked my body or embraced it for what it was.

Fast forward a couple of years, when someone started a fad on Facebook challenging women to post five pictures of occasions they felt beautiful. That one social media trend forever changed me. I posted a couple of selfies of times I was all dolled up. I had taken each one at that perfect angle—you know, where you look ten pounds skinnier. I posted a picture of me when I gave birth, and I posted the bikini pic of me in Cuba.

I was fascinated by this picture taken in Cuba because first, I had a six pack, and secondly, why in the heck did I not realize I had a rocking body? Why did it take three years later to grasp how amazing I looked? As I really studied the photo of my hot, sexy body, I realized it had been taken at a time in my life when I was an emotional mess. I remember bawling to my friend daily on that trip in Cuba because I was so stressed and overwhelmed with my life. I posted that pic on Facebook and couldn't believe the responses. To everyone else, it was a stunning portrait. To me, the image was far from beautiful. That whole thing felt like a sham. It was a front because I was hiding all of the negative clutter deep inside. I couldn't allow my true beauty to shine, nor could

I appreciate the outside beauty for what it was. The picture was a revelation—another “ah-ha” moment.

No matter how much weight we lose or how fit we become, most of us are never completely happy with how we look. There are always more ways to improve. We always seem to find another flaw to focus on. We dedicate so much time and energy to improving our looks, and yet we still find fault with ourselves. How often do we look in the mirror and say, “I’m breathtaking today!”?

Now, some of you reading this might think that this whole negative self-image thing doesn’t apply to you. You have great self-esteem. You walk with confidence. If you do, it is truly amazing, but I am asking you to be completely honest with yourself here. If you had to describe what you look like in the mirror—completely naked, to a blind person, what would you say? Would you even be comfortable looking at yourself without clothes and masks? Would you describe your flaws? Would you be able to illustrate your inner as well as your outer beauty? Not many of us can do that—not at first, anyway. I’ve done some deep work to be able to leave the house with no makeup and embrace my authentic face. It does get easier with practice, but it took intention and commitment to learn to accept and love what, and who, I am today.

Once we realize that it’s society’s perception of beauty that is flawed, we can begin to see ourselves in a different light. No matter how much we try to be perfect and beautiful, society is right there to tell us we’re not. We need to stop the pursuit of perfection and embrace what is. Gail Dines, an author and speaker, put it this

way: “If tomorrow, women woke up and decided they really liked their bodies, just think how many industries would go out of business.”<sup>4</sup> Take a moment, and really let this statement sink in. The impact would be felt around the world if we could just love and accept ourselves just as we are.

## OWN IT

Even after I realized I needed to work on self-love, I wasn't an overnight success at it. This journey is a major commitment, which starts with baby steps. You have to retrain your brain and own who you are, flaws and all. I started looking in the mirror when getting dressed and saying, “I am beautiful. I am enough. My body doesn't define who I am.” I say those statements every time a negative thought creeps up, and I do a system override. Those thoughts will never stop coming, but once you're able to detect when it happens and make a choice to replace the lies with truth, things start to shift. It is often stated it takes 21 days of repetitive behavior to change an old habit, but I guess it depends how long you have been living with the habit. If you have practiced negative self-talk for ten or even twenty-plus years, it might take longer than a few weeks to fall back in love with yourself.

Maybe after the 21 days, you develop the new habit. You recognize when that old habit has crept back in. Then you can change the course of your mind so you can own you, rather than hate on you. Starting with that simple step, I began rewiring my brain and heart to love the image I was staring back at in the mirror. Through subtle changes built up over time, I started to actually believe the words I was saying.

I attribute the inspiration to change to Taryn Brumfitt's documentary *Embrace*. Brumfitt once said, "Our bodies are not ornaments but vehicles for our dreams."<sup>5</sup> Just take a moment and reread that—now again, and again. Let that statement sink into every fibre of your being. Once you can truly appreciate the genius in that little phrase, it's like opening a whole other world of thinking. I added that statement to my daily self-talk ritual in front of the mirror, and when those words started to take root in my mind and heart, I felt like I had lifted weight and pressure off myself. It was so liberating to flip the off switch on society and own who I am.

As women, I don't think we fully realize how much we rely on the outer world to make us feel good about ourselves. We are constantly chasing something with no end. It's time we said, "Enough is enough, because I am more than enough." When I was finally able to turn the tables on what "beautiful" meant; it was such an important step in my self-love journey. Realizing the system is flawed is one thing but being able to push back and create your own system—where the definition of beauty is on your terms—that's where the real magic happens.

Flipping the switch on what we think is beautiful is no small task. Look at the abuse we inflict on our bodies to just feel pretty—plucking and pulling, applying makeup, hiding our bodies, and reconstructing them. Just think of your makeup routine, the clothes you wear, the hair colouring, the torture, the shaving; the list is endless. We have boob jobs and tummy tucks and even labia surgery. Did you know labiaplasties are on the rise? They are becoming more popular in Canada, the US, Australia and the UK. Some of these surgeries are for medical reasons, but the

majority of them are for aesthetics. We live in a world where we now have to wax and trim our genitalia, and we can only be sexy if we are hairless. Along with this fad of looking like a pre-teen, we are now exposing what our labias look like.

Newsflash—just like with any other body part, we all look different, but women see these images more often in changing rooms, movies, magazines, and social media. When we look at our own labia, we think we look different, so there must be something wrong. Instead of accepting that our parts might vary in appearance, but are all still normal, we try to change them to look like society's version of normal.

We do not need to look like anyone else. We do not need to hide our tummies and muffin tops. We do not need control-top panties and stockings. We do not need to wear tight camisoles under our shirts. We constantly use buffers to hide more of ourselves, layering tops and belts and sucking it in—it goes on and on. We need to face the reality that all women have belly jelly. Shapewear should be burned. Why on earth would women stuff themselves into these tight, sweltering things to hide a little bit of belly, back, or bottom fat? Shapewear can be compared to a boa constrictor. They slowly suffocate their prey by tightening themselves and cutting off blood supply. That is what shapewear is and does, in a nutshell.

Let's stop the torture and own it. Let's be free and comfortable in our own skin. For women all over the world, let's have a shapewear burning. Even the most toned women out there still have jiggles and rolls when they run or bend over. When you take a step back and really look at how companies market their products, you can

see they are effectively saying, “You are flawed, and we have the fix.” But it’s not a fix, it’s a Band-Aid to the real problem, which is our failure to embrace our own bodies. We need to start letting it hang out instead of hiding it, because our bellies are actually normal. We are not fat, we are normal and beautiful.

What are we doing to ourselves? Even girls in their 20s are saving money for these invasive surgeries? The question that keeps popping up in my mind is: “Why?” Why are we abusing our bodies on a daily basis? Why are we trying so hard to reconstruct our bodies until they aren’t even recognizable anymore? We are so conditioned to look for imperfections and problems, we now fix things that were never even broken.

## I AM HEROINE

Whenever spring approaches, we all seem to feel this simultaneous panic to start eating more salads. We start juicing and going for 5k runs to get ourselves ready for the summer bikini season. Even with the fittest of bodies, we all dread the moment when we face the mirror while bathing suit shopping. We try so hard to find a bathing suit that covers our cellulite, our jiggles, and our wiggles. And now, with all-inclusive vacations more affordable, it seems like women get the added pressure to fight for the elusive bikini body all year round. We have so much obsession and anxiety just thinking about trying on a bathing suit—and when you really look at women, most do not have the “perfect” bikini body.

A sweet friend of mine really put the bikini body myth into perspective for me. We were chatting and she asked, “Have you heard how you get a perfect bikini body?” I replied with, “How?”

She eloquently responded, “You just put a bikini on your body.” I stopped and really thought about it. It’s so simple and yet brilliant. That’s another statement you might want to reread over and over again until it literally sinks in. We don’t need to search for the perfect cut of a bathing suit or embark on a torturous boot camp exercise regimen. We just need to put on a bathing suit and own it.

If we wait for the flawless body to love ourselves, we will be waiting forever. Every single one of our bodies is flawed, according to society’s standards. But if that’s the case, maybe it’s ultimately our perception of “flawed” that is wrong. If we all fall short of the standard of beauty, then why are we trying so hard to achieve it? We should stop trying to meet the fake standard and decide to find beauty in the flaws. If we all looked the exact same way with the “ideal” body, how would we find our own uniqueness? The differences and flaws that we have are what set us apart from one another.

It’s time to set new norms for our bodies. Of course, I encourage healthy living, being active, and eating healthy. We can still strive for a healthy life while embracing our bodies at the same time. Being healthy or having a healthy body has nothing do with being beautiful. For some reason, we have made one reliant on the other, which is far from the truth. No matter what’s happening with our bodies, we are beautiful. The perfect body is exactly the body we have at this moment.

I don’t want to miss out on life because I’m too embarrassed to wear a bathing suit. I don’t want to miss one moment of my little girl playing in the sand or jumping in the pool because

my thoughts are consumed with how my body looks. Not every woman is built to have a six pack, and not every woman is built to carry extra weight. What if we just stopped obsessing and started accepting? No matter what our bodies look like, we are perfectly imperfect. I think Tyra Banks coined an amazing word when she said she is, “Flawsome®.”<sup>6</sup> I agree—Tyra, you are Flawsome®, and so is every woman in this world. I join your mission to empower. Flawed + Awesome = Flawsome® should be embraced around the world. We need to take a stand, to love who we are, and do our best to lead an all-round healthy life—mentally, emotionally and physically. We need to embrace and love instead of hiding and being ashamed.

## **FASHION OR FACADE**

Just like the bathing suit, every-day clothes can be used to hide the imperfections. Since really putting some thought into my clothes, I realized I bought a lot of black because it is thinning. I also realized I love funky hats and bright colours. What do your clothes say about you?

This is a really cool exercise: go into your closet and take note of the style or shape of your clothes. Do you buy things for coverage, so you don't stand out? Do you have a lot of neutral colours, with blacks and greys, or do you have loud, bold colours? Be honest and ask yourself what your clothing's main purpose is. Is it an artistic expression of your personality, or does it serve as a mask? Are you literally making your clothes your own hiding place?

I did some soul searching on why I wear so many things that stand out. I asked myself if I sought attention with my clothes,

or if they were just a form of expression. When I was honest with myself, I realized how much I do love bright cheery clothes and hats. There was a time though, when I was subconsciously trying to stand out and get attention because I needed approval. I wasn't able to accept myself, so I searched for acceptance from others, and my clothes were part of that mission. I no longer use my clothes to cover my insecurities but rather to highlight the glorious person I am, flaws and all. It's an amazing thing to take note of. Think about it and maybe discover something about yourself. It's just another mask to strip away in finding your authentic self. Today, I'm allowing my clothes to be an extension of my personality, and I love that about myself.

I just posed the question, "What do your clothes mean to you?" If we're willing to go there, we might as well go a step further and talk about makeup. Makeup was probably the most difficult thing for me to be honest about. I definitely lied to myself for a while about how much I depended on my makeup to feel pretty, or even presentable in public. I would say to myself, "Oh, yeah, I don't need makeup," but secretly, I would put on a little cover-up, some blush, and just a little eye liner, so I could go to the grocery store. Since I didn't have the eye shadow, mascara, or lipstick, I believed I was still natural. Wrong—if you can't step outside with no makeup at all and be okay with how your face looks, with bags under the eyes, zits, and all, then makeup is, on some level, a mask for you.

I know women all over are saying that's not them and defending why they wear makeup. I'm not here to judge because I truly love makeup. Makeup isn't a problem, and clothes are not a problem—it's the "why". Ask yourself, "Am I enough without it?" If you stand

in front of a mirror naked, without makeup, will you still think you are beautiful? If you stand in front of a room full of people completely unmasked, with flaws visible for everyone to see, will you still be beautiful and enough? If you aren't enough without the masks, you will never be enough with them.

The complete opposite could also be a mask. If you are so opposed to putting anything on your face at all, a question you could ask yourself is, "Why am I so opposed to even the idea of makeup?" Do you truly embrace your natural beauty or is it that you feel uncomfortable standing out or looking feminine? There is always a "why" in whatever we do and I challenge you to discover the reason behind your choices. From there we can delve deeper into who we really are. Let's embrace our faces and bodies and unmask ourselves. We are perfectly imperfect. We just need to open our eyes and believe it.

## **CHANGE THE VOICES**

I've spoken in great detail in this chapter about embracing our bodies and accepting what is, but there is a catch. You also need to realize that when you decide to embody heroine, it doesn't mean the negative thoughts automatically stop and you just love yourself every minute of every day. Actually, quite the opposite happens. The more you make a conscious effort to love yourself, the more your mind goes into overdrive to make you fall into the negative, toxic thinking it is used to. Change is uncomfortable and hard, and every time you think about how much you love yourself, different thoughts whisper the contrary. That's okay and normal. When this happens, you need to be able to recognize these subconscious attacks. Then you need to change the course

of those negative thoughts. Your old self used to fall into that trap, but now you have a newfound awareness. When you recognize the negative words are lies, your new response will be, “No. That is self-sabotage. I am enough. I am beautiful. I am talented. I have a voice. I am strong. I am a winner. I am precious and valuable. I matter. I am smart enough. My body doesn’t define my worth. I am capable, and I am here in this world with a purpose.”

Every minute of every day, we need to speak louder than those voices. We need to be louder than the insults we give ourselves. We need to be louder than social media. We need to close our listening ears when people say hurtful things. We need to change the negativity into positivity. Sowing the seed of intent and commitment for self-care will soon blossom into something amazing called self-love.

Once you start taking care of yourself, when attacks come your way from within or from the world, you can stop, reflect, and ask yourself, “Is this true?” and, “Is there anything I can do about it?” When you do, you strengthen the quick filter system in your head and your heart. You will notice some of those attacks don’t even bother you anymore because you let the truth sink in and discard the lies.

When you can get acquainted with what self-love looks like, you will never want to go back to who you were before. Nothing, and I mean nothing, looks or feels better in the entire world than accepting who you are and loving every single part of yourself—strengths and weaknesses, your insides and outsides. Love is the most powerful and magnificent force, and it will rock your world. This is the place you want to be. This is where you transform and

learn to F.L.Y. (“First Love Yourself”). Mark Sterling said it best: “If you want to soar in life, then you must first learn to FLY.”<sup>7</sup>

Once we’ve learned to F.L.Y., we can truly love others. When we change the obsession with our bodies to an obsession with loving everything about ourselves, even the flaws; it creates a space for unconditional love of self and others. We see and act with love. In that space, we develop more patience. We strengthen our empathy muscles. We begin to see things much differently. When people react, do and say things that are hurtful, we have the capability to now decipher the reason behind someone’s actions.

Often, people hurt others because they are hurting themselves. When we can take a step back in that moment and have pure insight without reaction, we allow our souls to communicate with the souls of others. Sometimes, we may wonder, “Why should I be nice when they don’t deserve it?” This is the greatest act of love. It’s so easy to be kind to those who are good people. Your response to people who aren’t perfect is the true test of character. When we get to the place where we fully love ourselves, love wants to burst out of us. We want to show love and empathy to everyone and everything.

Just as people harm others when they hurt inside, people who don’t love themselves don’t want to give love away. I promise you, the more love you can show for yourself, the more it will strengthen your relationships and allow you to see and act in love towards others. You deserve unconditional love, and this is ultimately about self-love. Don’t think about how others don’t deserve it; it’s you who deserves the love. You need to look past the cloudiness of others’ actions and allow love to triumph.

What if you are faced with the choice to allow love to triumph or to be right? Honesty is the best policy, right? Honesty is a tricky thing. People often say, “I’m just being honest.” Is that statement a free pass to be rude? Maybe the honesty statement is about being honest with ourselves. If we feel the need to correct someone or not let them get away with something, what does that say about us? Instead of righting a wrong and defending yourself to others, ask yourself honestly why this is triggering your emotions? Do you need to address something? Being your own bull-crap detector is the ultimate act of self-love. Your mind will fight you and say, “This isn’t about me; it’s about them.” That might even be true sometimes, but you have to own your reaction. If you take the bait and react in a negative way, then there is something to refine in yourself.

Whether it’s being honest with yourself or with others, it’s all in the delivery. I compare it to drinking black coffee. Most people can’t stomach the taste of plain, black coffee. It’s bold, strong and harsh. The majority of people need a little cream and sugar to sweeten the taste. So, I encourage everyone, when dealing with the honesty pill, to add a little gentleness and love. The information will still get through, but it will be received better because of the sweeter taste.

Let your inner warrior win the love battle. Let love override the concept of winning a debate. Let love melt away insecurities. Let loving yourself become the priority, and then those actions from others won’t be able to steer you off course from your own destiny and purpose. So many times, we get caught up in creating boundaries and we get sucked into a distraction. Some situations do need to be addressed and dealt with, but often these are just

moments that test your character. Once you see the big picture, that this is about loving yourself, you can see, speak, and walk in love. You don't even feel the need to engage in conflict. Then, in those times of conflict, we are able to deliver words, even honest ones, with love.

Then, you just move forward. You will have combined several ah-ha moments that forever shape how you think and speak about yourself, and how you communicate with others. It's the first step in learning how to unleash your inner heroine.

# Chapter 2

## SABOTAGE

### **SEX, DRUGS, AND FAT ROLLS**

There are many ways we sabotage our own self-worth. In every moment of the day, we are either uplifting or hurting ourselves. We may be looking in the mirror and looking away because we don't like the image we see or are participating in an activity that highlights our jiggles and soft spots. We do everything in our power to cover and camouflage so no one will tell what's going on underneath our clothes. Why do we take such extreme measures to hide our bodies? If we want to portray beauty, we need to change the way we think so showing our fat or dimples is not the ultimate crime.

Take, for instance, sex. Let's face it, no woman looks good during sex. We just don't need to think about the folds and creases and angles. We have wobbly bits, and no matter how skinny we are, there is an angle that is not as appealing as we would like. But we only think that our bodies are ugly because that's what we

have conditioned our brains to think. We insist the lights be off to undress, or we don't even fully undress to make love. We eliminate some key senses in intimacy because of fear. We need to start getting out of our heads and back into our bodies. We need to tell those negative thoughts to shove off and experience our bodies for the perfection they are. Let us be open to enjoy intimacy and pleasure and the connection that comes with making love.

Many obstacles in a woman's life challenge us in loving our bodies, and each one tests our self-confidence. For me, it's been medication. For twelve years, I have been dealing with Churg-Strauss syndrome,<sup>1</sup> an autoimmune disease, and have been taking steroids every day. I never struggled with weight gain prior to being sick, but after being on so many medications for so long, my body could not handle it. I swell up one day and not the next. I get bloated in my stomach, arms, and face. Sometimes my arms can't fit into the sleeves of my shirts. I don't feel sexy all of the time or even have a libido. I would experience months of being afraid to be naked in front of my husband because I was ashamed of my body. The more I focused my thoughts on what my body looked like, the more I pulled away from my husband, which drove a wedge into our relationship.

Thankfully, my husband was very patient and kind and just kept telling me I was beautiful. Sadly, hearing that wasn't enough. I never truly believed his words. He always said I was sexy and gorgeous, but I needed to change my own thinking. I had to train my brain to accept and embrace. I have spoken to several men about this, and they all say the same thing. They don't care about how many rolls or stretch marks are on your body; they

just want to get jiggy with the girl that turns their crank. Also, turning the lights off doesn't change your rolls; it just brings to light the insecurities within. The process of learning to love my body has brought a new level of intimacy into my relationship. I'm no longer distracted by my belly jelly; instead, I truly connect to the man I love.

If we can grasp the concept we all have imperfections, it won't be such a stretch to say, "We are all normal no matter what our skin or bodies looks like." We are so much more than a fat roll. We are more than just our bodies. We always hear about the whole person being mind, body, and soul, but it seems the world only focuses on the body. My body is only one third of my whole existence. Instead of focusing on the part that could be seen as a flaw, we have to start praising the parts that are pure perfection within us.

We need to start taking a stand. The other two-thirds of who we are matter more than what our bodies look like. When we focus so much on outward appearances, we tend to neglect what's happening on the inside, and that's when sabotage wins. If we looked at a brilliant artist who painted a masterpiece, would we praise their work, or would we draw attention to the fact that the artist was a mom who had a muffin top? What about a doctor who discovered a cure for a disease? Would we honour that accomplishment or criticize them for being 50 pounds overweight? The point is, let's admire our talents, our character, our personalities, and our numerous strengths that are so unique to each individual. Let's make *that* the standard of beauty rather than what our tummies look like.

Why are we ashamed of the rolls? Let's show the world what real women look like. "This is my story." I don't have stretch marks or a weight problem, but the image I have been looking at my whole life appeared ugly to me. I remember moments in my life in which someone commented on my extra stomach fat or the fact I had "cankles," and I crumbled inside. I felt ugly. People made fun of my big nose, and I began to realize I was very muscular and weighed twenty pounds more than any other girl who had my height.

I felt different, and when I looked in the mirror, I didn't adore who I was looking at. Instead, I obsessed over how to hide my body or how to change it. That's the problem today—from the tiniest of "fixes" to modifying our bodies to be prettier, we don't even know what a normal body looks like anymore. We apply fake everything to enhance our beauty, but that means we are telling ourselves we are not good enough on our own. Everything is so fake, we have lost touch with who we really are. We don't know what our natural hair colours are, and we have never shown people what our real bodies look like. We continually hide behind more masks.

As part of this book project, I decided to partner with a photographer to take photos of women unmasked. In that vulnerable state, they took a stand, stripped away their insecurities one layer at a time, and bared their bodies. You will see these exquisite beauties later on in this book, but I felt I couldn't ask people to do this if I wasn't prepared to do the same. So, I pushed through my own fears and chose to be authentic and vulnerable, to share what my body looks like. I am normal, and I am heroine.



## THE LIES WE BELIEVE

When you really take note of the daily, subtle, almost subliminal messages that say we aren't good enough, it's astounding. The cards are stacked against us unless we find a deep confidence within to withstand those negative messages. Take, for instance,

the magazines we see at the grocery store or gas station. Their images of fake beauty tell us that we need to look like the photo-shopped models to achieve beauty in society. Commercials, TV shows, and movies all set the standard of what a pretty woman is, and what men want. We look at ourselves and say, “I sure don’t look like that,” and take steps to become what the world portrays as beautiful. These are lies, and we need to stop feeding them. Social media is another portal for these messages. Have you ever noticed that if you like or share one thing that talks about health or fitness, you get inundated with posts about how to get a flat tummy in two months or how to achieve that perfect body? Your newsfeed gets slammed with articles and videos on how to get rid of wrinkles, or how to lose water weight.

The list never ends. Instead of social media being a forum to stay connected to the world around us, it becomes a place that isolates and destroys our confidence. My mind even tried to sabotage my own project. I felt bloated and was going to make an excuse not to do the shoot that night, but I decided to ignore the lies. I made a choice to let truth prevail.

Finding inner strength and self-love doesn’t come easily. It is a constant up-hill battle that we will forever have to fight. But the battle is worth fighting. It’s worth it for our own health and well-being. It is worth it for our children and our children’s children. We are in a marathon war. If you think you are going to sprint to victory, think again. We need to build a tribe of support because this battle will not be won individually, but through pure determination and strength in numbers. We need to be trail blazers and bulldoze the negative messages to protect our identities. We are perfect just as we are.

Now that I have pointed out some of the ways these negative messages come at us every day, let's take notice of when we buy into those messages. Observe how many times in a day you think or say something that is harmful to your soul. You might not think what you say has much of an impact on you, but it truly does. When we look in a mirror or see other women that we think are prettier than we are, what thoughts pass through our minds? I didn't realize how many toxic thoughts took place until I made a conscious effort to notice them. The thoughts come so quickly, making them hard to detect at first. So, I suggest writing them down on paper or on your phone. You will be shocked at the number of times you talk "smack" about yourself. It is toxic to compare your body to someone else. They aren't you.

The takeaway from this exercise is to grasp that we have been fighting the wrong war. The war isn't supposed to be against ourselves, it's against the messages and bullets of doubt that are penetrating our hearts, souls, and minds.

Now that we understand how many toxic thoughts we allow to enter our brains, let's look at how we react when we get a compliment. How do you receive a compliment? As I mentioned before from my own experiences, when people admired me, I would shoot down the accolades and respond with how I felt I had I gained weight, etc. It's very interesting to me what we find when we observe how we react to compliments. I think we are trying to act humble, but it's anything but humility. We are sabotaging ourselves by not honouring the praise. In turn, we are saying to ourselves and to everyone who knows us, we don't believe we are deserving of love.

What is the point of a compliment anyway? We may compliment other people all the time, but we refuse to accept praise for ourselves. How hurt would you be if you gave a gift to someone and they refused it? We don't even realize what a precious gift a compliment actually is. In a world filled with so much negativity and hurt, why aren't we capitalizing on something that builds people up and promotes love? This is a prime example of self-care. In that split second of receiving an admiring comment, how will you show yourself you matter? How will you accept love? When you receive a compliment, I challenge you, to truly appreciate it and start believing it. Don't dismiss it. Don't belittle it. Embrace it.

What happens when you don't get a compliment but rather a dig? Some might even offer a back-handed compliment. You know those times when you leave a conversation bewildered, dissecting what was said and asking yourself whether it was supposed to be kudos or a criticism? That happens to me on a regular basis.

People say, "I looked at you and thought, wow, if she could do it, so can I." What is that supposed to mean? Another dig that really stuck with me was when I was nineteen and chatting with a male friend. I thought he was pretty cute, but my fear was he would never be interested in a girl like me. That fear became my reality when a really hot girl walked by, and he stopped dead in his tracks while in conversation with me to comment on how gorgeous she was. It was like the wind was knocked out of him. Her beauty captivated him. After several seconds, which felt like an eternity to me, he came back down to earth and realized he had just done all of that in front of me. He sensed he owed me

some sort of explanation or had to do something to make me feel better. This is all he could come up with: “Oh, don’t worry, Blaise, you have a nice personality.”

That comment affected me for years because I wasn’t very confident in myself. I took that explanation to mean I’m not very pretty. As I began to appreciate my own unique beauty, I realized my personality makes me stunningly gorgeous. I’m quite proud of that. I decided to change the outcome of the back-handed compliment. We can’t stop those from coming, but we can choose to drop the back-hand and just let what is said be a compliment.

## **UNDER ATTACK**

It is fascinating to me how I discover deeper meanings of life with each year I live. Reflection has given me such revelation on how I actually used to regard myself. Looking back, I see that my actions, words, and thoughts indicated a profound self-loathing. I started to dissect those moments in front of a mirror; the times I said things in my head or spoke words out loud, and I came to a realization. I didn’t only believe the negative attacks from the world, but I was an active participant in the war against myself. I was getting hit from both sides. How could I have let this happen? Honestly, I never really thought about it. I knew I had my insecurities, but I never put any consideration into them. I figured all people had their hang-ups, and that’s normal.

Unless you have an “ah-ha” moment when you realize that it’s a little more than a hang-up, that you are actually a key part in the attacks against yourself, it’s hard to understand the magnitude of

the damage you are causing. As humans, we don't always allow ourselves to reflect deeply on a daily basis. The nitty gritty truth is never an easy pill to swallow. It's much easier to try not to think about those things than to have to deal with our issues.

I do feel the outside pressures and criticisms from society play a large role in how we feel about ourselves. Essentially, the attacks from the inside are the ones that do the most damage. When positioning a bomb to affect the most destruction, you don't merely put it beside a building. The bomb deeply embedded within the structure does the most damage. That's how I feel about self-sabotage. We will always have outside bombs and attacks, but the internal bombs we are setting off each day in our own minds wreak the most havoc. Every time you compare yourself to others, say you gained weight, obsess about calories, fixate on working out, don't wear that outfit because you feel fat in it, think you're ugly, hide your cellulite, stretch marks, and muffin top, believe your acne makes you less pretty, doubt you're a real woman if you can't get pregnant, and fear wearing a bikini, it's like setting off mini-nuclear bombs in your soul.

During my pregnancy, I had horrible morning sickness for the entire nine months. I ended up losing a ton of weight. I threw up day and night, and when I wasn't puking, I was too nauseated to eat. So, after I had my baby, I was able to eat again, and I put on weight. I felt I was skinnier pregnant, and I started to have issues looking in the mirror.

I had this little baby who took up every moment of my day, and I ate whatever was easiest. I didn't have time to work out, and the pounds kept coming. I really wasn't gaining a lot of weight, but

in my mind, I built up the weight gain so much, I might as well have gained 50 pounds. The truth was I had only gained ten. My attacks within were so powerful, they changed my self-image. The image was distorted because I had fallen into self-sabotage.

In the game of life, sometimes it seems like you can't win. You're either too skinny, too fat, too muscular, too short, too tall, too smart, too quiet, too loud or not smart enough—the list goes on forever. No matter what, you are trained to think you are not good enough, and you should change some aspect of yourself. Becoming a mom just ups the ante. There's now another gateway of added pressure and unrealistic standards to measure up to. The game of life is such a contradiction, and it's rigged to never allow contentment because you are always at war. We need to call a truce within ourselves. We need to stop trying to fit in and be accepted. The attacks from the world will never stop coming. The game of life is always in play. Jack Dempsey once said, "The best defense is a good offense."<sup>2</sup> Though that was a term originally used in military combat from Prussian Soldier Carl von Clausewitz, this is very fitting for the internal war we wage in our minds.

The way we win the war against sabotaging attacks is to start building a bomb shelter from within. The outside attacks can only cause flesh wounds. The challenge is to halt the self-doubt and negative self-talk and lead a charge of love and tenderness from within.

Once you build that "bomb shelter" or shield from within, you can use it as a filtering system. Coupled with leading that charge of self-love, you are no longer allies with the warring attacks. Eliminating the attacks from within strengthens you, and then

you're able to see with new eyes. You no longer see yourself as a target, and you're able to focus on the outward attacks and not let them infiltrate you. When we have new vision and see why and where these attacks are coming from, we begin to see ourselves and others differently.

*Shallow Hal*<sup>3</sup> is one of my many favourite movies. It's an out-there comedy, but the message behind the laughs is truly one to take to heart. Tony Robbins hypnotizes Jack Black's character so he sees people's true inner beauty rather than judging a book by its cover. When he meets someone, he isn't distracted by the background noise—rather, he is able to see the person's core and appreciate their brilliance. Similarly, once you've activated your new filter system, you will only see the beauty behind the chaos. Even the attacks from the outside won't feel as harsh, and you will begin to win the war. Granted, you might lose some battles or weaken at times, but if you continue to strengthen your inner bomb shelter, I promise you will win the war on self-love.

## REFINING MOMENT

It took me 35 years to love myself. You could say that's a long time and very sad. It is true—it is sad that we live in a world in which we are led to believe we are not good enough, and it takes so long to reach that “ah-ha” moment. What I've come to realize is that it's not a waste of time. Televangelist, Joel Osteen, once compared our lives to a GPS.<sup>4</sup> Just like with GPS, you might take some detours along the way, but you will always get rerouted. You will still get to your destination. Those detours are what refine your character. You could say your detours sabotaged your

destiny, but I don't think you would be mature enough without the detours. Though I took some wrong turns and detours in my life, I was learning and growing.

Even when I fell down and looked like a total and complete failure, I was being refined. Some might mistake diamonds in the rough as insignificant rocks. We are not insignificant, and we aren't useless. We are in our refining process. For some it takes less time; for others, longer. I picked bad boyfriends. I worked at bad jobs. I got rejected and treated poorly. I made poor choices at times and got myself into pickles, but no matter what, my GPS kept working. It directed me to become the woman I am today. Through the mistakes, the sabotages, and attacks, I can proudly say I am becoming a brilliant diamond, flaws and all.

We are all diamonds who need to be crushed, chipped away, shaped and polished. According to Eric Thomas, "Everyone wants to be a diamond, but some don't want to get cut."<sup>5</sup> We all want to shine but may not realize the amount of pressure and pain it takes to get to that point.

Unfortunately, to become brilliant, we need to endure more than we think we can handle, and we may prematurely push the stop button on our refining process, which is just another form of self-sabotage. We need to learn there is a reason for the trials and hardships in our lives. We don't become the best versions of ourselves without pressure and situations that test us. When things are easy, it's great, but it's not helping us grow.

Some might feel they don't deserve to shine. It's truth time; we have all done things we regret and feel bad about. We are not perfect. We all do things that we aren't proud of, but we need to

let go of those mistakes, move forward, and shine. We need to work with the pressures of life and allow them to transform us into the most brilliant of diamonds. When you become a polished diamond, you are resilient and strong because you withstood the pressure test. Don't hinder your brilliance. There's no more guilt and shame. Let your light shine.

We try so hard to fix the outside, but we won't find true contentment until we fix the inside. Beauty isn't just surface level; it's an inside job. It's about refining your character, your actions and reactions, appreciating your flaws, and developing your strengths. Another thing to realize is we are never going to be out of the refining process until the day we die. Some tests are harder than others. Some seasons are longer than others, but we are always in need of refining and growth. If we stop growing, we become stagnant, and that's not living. I was always trying to feel better about myself, but to no avail. I struggled with loving myself. Not until the last two years of my self-work did I discover that self-love truly comes from the inside. No husband, no partner, no friend, no perfect parent or child could change how I viewed myself; it had to come from within.

Slowly over time, with minor adjustments and stripping away the layers, I discovered I didn't have to be perfect to love myself. All I needed to do was just accept—accept who I am, flaws and all, and still be okay with the image I was looking at in the mirror. I had to work on my inner self. People will not always understand or approve, and I had to be okay with that. I still have to tell myself that I'm okay. It's no one else's life but mine, and I need to make it work for me. Every day, I tell myself I am perfectly imperfect, and thankfully, I'm still a work in progress.

Doing all of the work on the inside has made me so brilliant that my light shines brightly for the whole world to see.

When you realize the refining process is working in your favour, you grasp the incredible strength you've developed. When you become strong like a diamond, all of those attacks from the outside become just flesh wounds—they don't penetrate you. You are able to understand the attacks and talk yourself through many trials because of the maturity you have developed. When you are faced with an attack, it's an amazing feat to step back and have crystalline clarity about what's going on. With that maturity also comes a deep love for yourself, so that you work to protect yourself rather than join the fight. You accept the process of life and let it work for you, not against you. That is the ultimate form of self-love.

At the time I started this book process, I had sustained more than enough trials for a lifetime. In 2016, I suffered from numerous bouts of pneumonia, a collapsed lung, and two miscarriages. I had a lot of conflict with people and felt like I was under attack from all sides. I cried in my darkest of hours and asked God why this was all happening to me. When I was dealing with the second miscarriage, I felt an answer to my question come over me like a crashing wave. It flooded every fibre of my body, and all I could sense was the word "surrender." You have to surrender to the process and allow life to mould and refine you.

Stop fighting. Let the growth take place. Once I let go of it all, I felt such an incredible peace fill my heart. I really felt true beauty and harmony within. I had finally put an end to the sabotage.