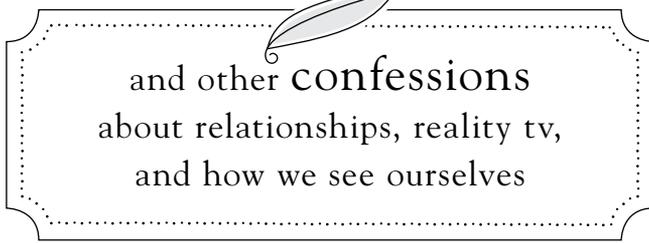


why i hate green beans

A decorative flourish consisting of several elegant, swirling lines that trail off to the right, ending in a small leaf-like shape.A decorative rectangular box with a dotted border and ornate, curved corners. A small leaf-like flourish is attached to the top center of the box.

and other confessions
about relationships, reality tv,
and how we see ourselves

Lincee Ray

A stylized, bold letter 'R' logo.

Revell

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Grand Rapids, Michigan

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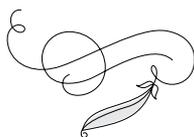
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For Mama—a lover of green beans



Simple Disclaimer

Even though my mama suggested I “call them out,” I’d like to formally announce that some of the names of people in this book have been changed to protect the ones who can’t help but act like jack wagons. I also collected consent forms from friends I mentioned, in exchange for withholding embarrassing stories from the manuscript. Let the record show that money was never exchanged, just favors.

However, if you or someone you Snapchat happens to personally know, sort of know, or is friends with the CrossFit trainer who was slightly disappointed but mostly pleased with the *Gilmore Girls* revival and sounds exactly like one of the people described in my book, none of this is personal and I’m sure they are all lovely people.

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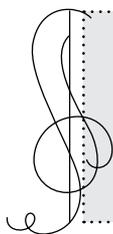
Introduction

I May Hate Green Beans, but I Love Oreos

I can't recall the first time I tried green beans, but I do know I have decided to hate them forever. Sure, they smell like feet, but the unappealing aroma has little to do with my aversion. I hate green beans because my mom made me eat them to lose weight.

Once I hit puberty I pretty much lived in the curvy category of life. I was the epitome of a boisterous lyric by Sir Mix-a-Lot and oddly unfazed by this fact. This puzzled my tall, thin mother. Why would anyone embrace a figure that wasn't exactly like Twiggy's from the sixties?

If I've learned anything over the years, it's this: the majority of women on the planet struggle with a variety of insecurities.



Our skinny jeans deceive us.
Our grandmothers' cold cream regimens torment us.
Our Facebook feeds taunt us with images of everyone else's picture-perfect lives.

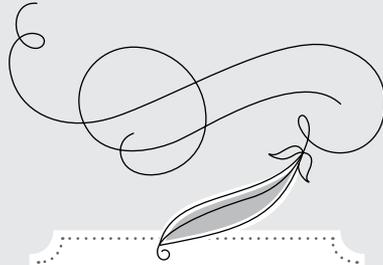
Introduction

I wrote this book to encourage women everywhere to embrace the days when we aren't feeling like our best selves. It's for everyone who's tried the latest fad diet or online dating app and failed—again. It's for those of us who scour the internet looking for ways to reduce stress, only to roll our eyes when we discover step one is always the same: cut out the caffeine.

As if that's going to happen.

We long for someone who's been there to walk close to us through life's difficulties. I know what it's like to laugh uncontrollably about insecurities. I also know what it's like to hurt deeply because of those same inhibitions. Much like our favorite bras, we women must lift up each other in a spirit of camaraderie. Whether about maneuvering the muffin top, navigating the sketchy waters of singleness, or walking the judgmental halls of the workplace, these stories are my way of sharing certain truths I've learned along the way and found incredibly helpful.

Yoga pants are your friend, Jesus sees you, and green-bean diets are never the answer.



PART 1

*mirror, mirror
on the wall*

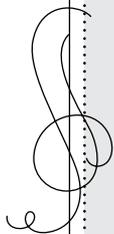
.....
Seasonal-themed Oreos are one
of God's greatest gifts.
.....

1

Why Is Charlie Brown's Teacher Talking to Me?

I had the coolest language arts teacher in the eighth grade. Not only did Mrs. Smith make studying grammar, composition, and public speaking a fun activity, but she also took the time to invest in our lives. Her assignments were creative and entertaining, and they often involved her students really digging into their tender junior high brains, forcing us to take a good strong look at who we currently were as well as who we wanted to be.

One homework assignment involved designing a coat of arms to represent different phases of our lives. Mrs. Smith presented us with six prompts, and each answer had to be expressed through a drawing. I recently found the folder with my coat of arms proudly displayed on the front. With great humiliation I share my results of that assignment with you now.



1. What was the most significant event in your life?

I drew Mickey Mouse ears. The most significant event in my fourteen years of life was that one time I went to Disney World when I was eleven years old. The seed was planted early, friends. I love Disney.

2. Draw your happiest moment in the past year.

I drew a piece of paper with the words *math test* on it and a 100 written in red at the top. The happiest moment of eighth grade was making a perfect score on a pre-algebra test. Math was difficult for me in general, and it became a sensitive topic in my world. I strongly believe the hours I spent trying to learn the area of a triangular prism contributed to the love and dedication I have for the characters on *The Big Bang Theory*.

3. Indicate something at which you are good.

I was good at holding purple pom-poms. I absolutely loved being on the cheerleading squad, but I'd like to point out that a flawless math test trumped making cheerleader as my happiest moment that year.

4. What is something you are striving to become or be?

Without a doubt, Young Lincee was striving to one day make the Hallsville Bobcat Belle drill team. No contest.

5. If you had one year to live and were guaranteed success in whatever you attempted, what would you attempt?

First, that's a little morbid, don't you agree, Mrs. Smith? Second (I am not making this up), I drew a scale with

the arrow pointing to ninety pounds. I surrounded the scale with Dr Pepper bottles and Hershey chocolate bars and wrote, "I would eat fatty foods and not gain weight."

6. If you died today, what three words would you most like to be said about you?

"I liked her."

In summary, my coat of arms epitomized a girl who loved Disney, experienced major anxiety about perfection, longed for a stage, was fiercely self-conscious about her weight, had a minor Dr Pepper addiction, and desired for people to like her above all else.

At times today, that coat of arms is a clone of what it was decades ago. I find myself battling the same insecurities I did in Mrs. Smith's class. Fortunately, I have a healthier perspective on life—and work that affords me the opportunity to go to Disney World.

I didn't always drag around these insecurities. When I was young, self-doubt never occurred to me. I was rarely unsure. I performed for my family, my friends, my dolls, the dog, the horses, whoever was driving the car, patrons in the grocery store, a brick wall, and the imaginary audience in my huge backyard. I spent days making up routines in the swimming pool, on the trampoline, in roller skates, or on the picnic table. It's what I did. It's who I was.

Someone should have intervened the summer of 1980 when I constantly sang the entire soundtracks from *Annie*, *Grease*, and *The Sound of Music* against the balcony in the living room as though I were a miniature *Evita*. I was obsessed with a little redheaded orphan, an Australian Goody Two-Shoes hopelessly devoted to a T-Bird, and solving a problem like Maria. My outbursts of song and dance didn't seem to bother my parents or my sister. Mama and Jamie had even been known to join in a time

or two. Daddy would emphatically roll his eyes and turn up the volume on the TV.

Performing is in my DNA. My extended family embraces the stage because life doesn't make sense without one. My grandmother designs dance costumes for a living. Most of my aunts and cousins have old megaphones in their closets that are frequently utilized. That's why they are in the closet and not the attic—easy access. Give any one of the Ray women a baton and she'll immediately launch into a routine from days of yore. Give that same baton to me and I will use it to knock some object off a high shelf.

It wasn't until puberty kicked in that I experienced my first bouts of insecurity. I became conscious of my peers watching me and deduced they probably had opinions about what they were seeing.

Do they like my dance moves?

Do they appreciate my ability to rock a mic like a vandal?

Do they think I'm stupid?

Are they laughing because of how my cheerleader uniform fits?

When did we inaugurate a popular crowd, and what does "two-faced" mean?

Weren't we all friends last week?

Overnight, I morphed into an introvert who was often mistaken for an extrovert. If you put me on a track that encircled a football field, I could easily bust out a crowd-pleasing cheer and have a blast doing it. But you wouldn't expect me to make eye contact with you in the hallway, because I would hate to disrupt your between-the-bells rhythm and accidentally make you late for class.

The same is true today. If I walk into a party crowd, I find a nice spot near a vertical surface and remain stationary for the duration of the merriment, which, fingers crossed, is hopefully a come-and-go affair. I try to provide amusement to anyone who dares approach the

weirdo wallflower. Never presume I freely mingle with other guests like a civilized human being. I must be physically pulled by the arm toward the person you want me to meet—that is, if I haven't already snuck out the back door.

Season two of *New Girl* introduced me to the life-altering genius that is the Irish good-bye. Thanks to Nick Miller's reclusive ways, I have since mastered the art of removing myself from a social situation with little to no farewell. Please understand that I will stealthily seek out the host of the gathering and genuinely thank him or her for including me on the invite list. My mother and Emily Post didn't raise a monster. But the rest of you jokers will probably receive a nice text explaining my whereabouts or never hear from me at all. This mysterious character trait is part of my charm.

If, however, I have a designated role in entertaining or educating that same crowd, I do the exact opposite. Put a microphone in my hand and I'm unstoppable. Offer me a headset like the one Britney Spears wears and I will regale you with tales and include wild hand gestures and comedic facial expressions. Give me a podium and I'll abandon my notes midspeech. I thrive on improvisation and have often been known to go rogue.

What's that you say? Your emcee bailed and you need someone to run the show on a moment's notice? Take me to your event and allow me to save the day.

This gregarious character trait is part of my charm too.

I desperately want to be seen. And at certain times I am equally terrified that will happen. I live with the constant nag of my introvert side begging me to blend in while my extrovert side craves to tag a conversation with the perfect sarcastic comment. It's a peculiar juxtaposition.

The need to perform often wins out. It's in my blood and can't be stopped. I guarantee if you look through a microscope at the chromosomes that make up my genes, they will be positioned in a perfect pyramid, wearing rhinestone headbands.

My people are dancers, twirlers, gymnasts, and cheerleaders. That eighth-grade coat of arms correctly foreshadowed my trying out and later securing a spot on the Hallsville Bobcat Belle drill team my sophomore year of high school. I couldn't wait to put on my uniform with the sparkling overlay full of purple and gold sequins, as well as my brand-new white boots. I practiced kicking my leg high enough to touch the brim of my hat. I soaked up every eight-count, every practice, every routine, and every second on the football field. This was where I was meant to be.

What I didn't love was being measured and weighed on Mondays. Did I ever consider this tradition an incredibly antiquated practice? Nope. I accepted Weigh Day as the bane of my existence. That horrific chart in our director's office mocked me every single week. It said I was five feet two with small bones, therefore I should weigh 108 pounds.

Interesting. I was a fifteen-year-old girl with muscular legs and a "healthy" *derrière*, and some doctor in a book published in 1974 thought I should weigh what I had back in fifth grade. Why, this made perfect sense!

The green beans first appeared when it was reported that the extra four pounds of insulation I was carrying around declined to budge. Mama believed with all her heart that green beans contained supernatural enzymes that promoted weight loss. She still does. She has personally experienced the phenomenon on more than one occasion, and she was perfectly willing to buy as many cans of this vegetable as needed to melt away the unwanted excess around my haunches.

Mama loves a green bean. Ordinary people eat them sautéed, caramelized, bacon-wrapped, roasted, casseroled, or barbecued. Unfortunately, these recipes are chock-full of extra ingredients that counteract the weight-reducing molecular structure found in the bean itself. Mama prefers to eat them straight out of the can; therefore her daughters would eat them straight out of the can. I

always complained that they smelled like a boy's locker room and tasted like sweaty socks.

She popped them like Tic Tacs.

I had to put my foot down the day beets established a regular rotation in my diet. I believe any food that stains a paper plate shouldn't be introduced into my digestive system. Mama obliged and simply doubled up on my green bean helping. She also suggested I pack some green beans and maybe a chicken breast or two for my lunch the next day. I started crying.

Trying to be incognito about an air-based diet in the high school cafeteria is no easy task. While other girls ate their Wonder Bread sandwiches, nacho cheese Doritos, and cinnamon-flavored Teddy Grahams, I attempted to look cool choking down my rice cake with a SlimFast chaser. There's nothing like the chalky aftertaste of a French vanilla bean shake to get you through an afternoon slump.

After a year dancing on the drill team line, my dream was to prove myself worthy of becoming a lieutenant. Officer tryouts were looming, and I began to get nervous. You see, for every pound over your ideal weight, you received a demerit. For every demerit you incurred, points would be taken off your final score at tryouts. I hovered around 112 and cursed those extra four pounds every time I stepped onto the scale. I needed a new strategy. Something different.

Enter the cabbage soup diet.

Lord, help me. If green beans are the smelly feet of all garden crops, then cabbage is the stinky armpit of the edible plant world. This diet was sweeping the nation and promised a ten-pound weight loss in only one week. As I lifted the lid to peek at the limp cabbage, tasteless celery, and pathetic tomatoes bubbling away in a huge pot, I immediately deduced this particular food blend had to be a distant relative of the hot mush Miss Hannigan served the orphans.

Annie was right. It is a hard-knock life.

My sister and I hated this soup so much we poured the concoction into a blender so we could trick our brains into adopting the myth

that it was a smoothie. A brown, gritty, disgusting smoothie. Mama drank it as though it were going out of style. Of course she did.

When the week of tryouts arrived, I was still a great big chunk (eye roll) at 111 pounds. Nothing was helping me lose the weight. No amount of Jane Fonda workouts could suppress my fear that I would be docked three points on my final tryout score. My dream of trading in my purple uniform for a white officer uniform was coming to a close.

The night before the big day, Mama came to me holding a tiny pill in the palm of her hand. “Swallow it,” she said. “This will help you.” I didn’t hesitate. I examined the object, chucked it into my mouth, and waited for her to explain the anticipated effects of the magic capsule I had ingested.

I feel as though I need a disclaimer here. I am a child of the eighties, and I want to formally announce that the DARE program worked on me. I said nope to dope. I preferred hugs over drugs. I wasn’t one to Hoover pills for the fun of it. It’s different, however, when your prescription medication provider is your own mother. She had to take matters into her own hands.

Mama called for reinforcements, and that came in the form of a spare water pill from the secret stash of a good friend. Mama explained that all the excess water I may be retaining would be evacuated over the next several hours. Who needs sleep when drill team tryouts are in the morning? Desperate times call for desperate measures.

I went to the bathroom seven times in twelve hours that night. I woke up feeling refreshed, energized, relatively lighter, and ready to conquer the scale as well as my solo. *Let’s do this.*

I skipped breakfast, because any rational person would know eating a healthy meal before a long day of tryouts would utterly counteract the desired effects of all that excess water being eliminated from my system. Mama dropped me off at the school, and I immediately hightailed it to the scale and begged my director to

weigh me. I was down to 107 pounds. *Oh happy day!* Had cell phones existed back then, I would have taken a selfie and posted it on all social media platforms. #blessed

I ran off to find my best friend, Julie, in the hallway. She was super excited to hear I had miraculously lost the weight. We started warming up, and minutes later we were escorted into the gym to perform the standardized team routine in front of the judges. The next round was the high kick line. Then we waited for callbacks. All that took about four hours.

Around lunchtime, I specifically recall Julie offering me some Cheese Nips from a plastic baggie. I resisted the temptation. One Nip would make me bloated. I refused to chance it. Instead I adjusted my glorious red, white, and blue stars-and-stripes overlay that perfectly symbolized my patriotic-themed solo, set to the classic tune of “Yankee Doodle Dandy.” My prop was one of those white wooden guns the girls in the flag corps spun.

Can you tell a bunch of family twirlers helped me choreograph this routine? *Here's hoping I nail my toss turnaround, and God bless America.*

I performed my solo and squealed with Julie as she finished hers. Then we marched in one by one for our interviews. One judge suggested, “Using the letters of your name, describe yourself with adjectives.” My knee-jerk reaction was irritation. I have not one, but two *e*'s in my name. That's a hard letter, and this entire exercise suddenly seemed unfair. I took a beat—smiling, of course—to collect my thoughts and answered Lovely, Intelligent, Normal, Creative, Elegant, and Effervescent. I thought I did a pretty good job. Poor Alexis is probably still sitting in that gym trying to come up with an *x* word.

We quickly changed back into our basic leotards for another few rounds of dance and high kicks. We waited for our turn in the hot hallway and then burst through the doors into the cold gymnasium. Back and forth. Round and round. The judges kept mixing us up

in groups of five, trying to determine who would prevail at the end of the day as Bobcat Belle officers.

We had just performed the routine known as “the strut” and were poised at attention as the judges wrote down their comments, when my exciting day started to go south.

I was standing still in drill team position. My head was high, my smile was big, and my vision was uncharacteristically blurry. I squinted my eyes and glanced at Julie. *Why on earth would the judges need to see us in dim lighting? And what’s that drumbeat? Did the band come to prove we can dance to their music? Oh wait. That’s my heartbeat thumping in my ears.*

Suddenly I realized the judges were talking, but I couldn’t understand. Trust me when I say Charlie Brown’s teacher is real and she lives in the form of a woman from Jacksonville, Texas, who judges drill team competitions. I turned my ear to try to decipher the “wah, wah, wah” language, but I came up short.

Let me be clear. Not once did I ever deliberate, “What’s going on with me?” I took the darkness, the phantom Bobcat band, and Charlie Brown’s teacher as standard operating procedure. Much like the *N* in my name, they were completely normal at the time.

Julie was directly to my right. I got the sense she was worried about me, but I didn’t know why. As I looked at her, she was telling me with her eyes that I should be moving. I looked to my left, and the girl who had previously been right there seconds ago was halfway to the door. I started to follow, feeling sluggish. I kept telling myself to smile. That’s the last thing I remember before slamming into a wall and falling onto the gymnasium floor.

Perhaps I should amend that “intelligent” adjective from my name?

I woke up to Charlie Brown’s teacher, another judge, and my director clapping their hands and slapping me on the face. Someone kept shouting, “Honey? Are you okay?” I looked up, confused, and immediately blurted, “Please don’t make me do a callback! I

can't do it!" and mumbled something about Cheese Nips and how I love being from the land of the free and the home of the brave. I'm quite sure Charlie Brown's teacher shares my story at conventions and parties.

I'm proud to inform you I did make officer that eventful day. So did Julie.

I should also share that those pesky five pounds came back almost immediately. My grandmother had to make me a new white uniform because the school didn't own any that fit my body. Much like Shakira's hips, my hourglass figure did not lie.

Sometimes I want to take that lovely, normal girl and hold her in my arms and tell her she is so much more than a number on a scale. I want her to embrace the curves and the muscles. I want her to freely eat those Halloween Oreos.

I want her to know I see her struggle, and I want to tell her it's going to be okay.