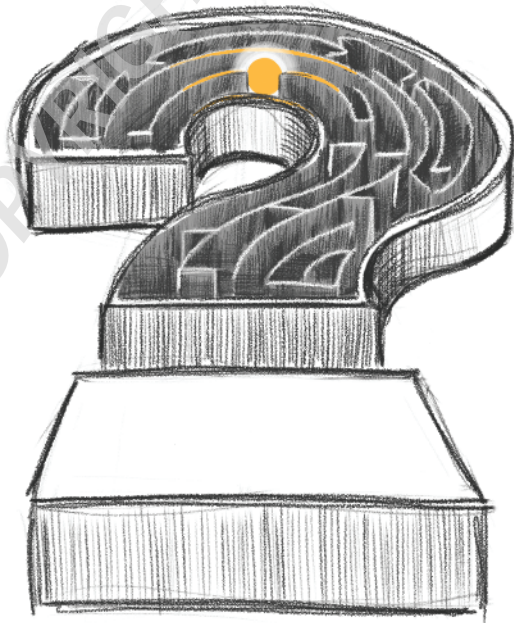


1

CHAPTER

Somewhere Now



Being a teenager is brilliant and shite.

Now, there's a sentence that's never been written at the start of any book ever. Until now, obviously. A famous author once told me, 'Be sure to always start with a bold statement, Gavin!'

So, there's my bold statement. To be honest I could probably finish the book there too. A one sentence book. A one pager that would make more sense to teenagers than any other book ever written.



Being a teenager is brilliant and shite. The end.

Technically that's two sentences, but you get the idea!

Life gives us 7 years of teenagering. In the grand scheme of things, it's not a lot. And yet, it's EVERYTHING when you're in it. 7 years, that's 84 months of change, 364 weeks of weird and 2,555 days of WTF!

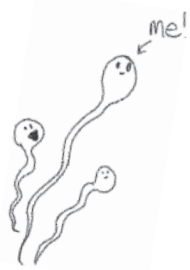
Life throws everything it can at us during this time. All the highs, all the lows and *everything* in between. It's the ultimate sandwich of life. Kid

life on one side, grown-up life on the other. And in the middle, 61,320 hours of scrolling and inconvenience.

3,681,644 minutes. Every single one a gift.



Yes, a gift.



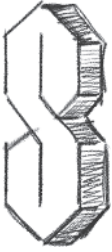
After all, you're lucky to be here. Of all the 100 million sperm, it was you. That, dear reader, is a very big thought and one that probably makes you want to throw up in your own mouth. But, it's also true. We are all lucky to be here. And the fact we get to 'teenager' for a while is really pretty special.

Parents tell us our teenage years are 'the best years of our life'. They can be, but the truth is, most grown-ups have forgotten that, sometimes, our teenage years are also horrendous.

Teenagers are completely misunderstood. The reality is, being a teenager is just like being a toddler all over again. Toddlers are always trying to discover their world in new and exciting ways, because they don't know anything about it.

You're also trying to discover the world too. But this time you've got every single stress imaginable on your shoulders. Friends, looks, parents, social media, exams, boys, girls, expectations, etc., etc.

The media paints a picture. They tell us you're all obsessed with sex and drugs. Apparently, you all sit on a lot of benches and get drunk, causing trouble.



Anytime I was unhappy or going through a tough time, my parents used to tell me it was down to hormones. Great, thanks for the helpful advice during this awful experience that I'm having, glad to hear it's just hormones. . . .

Truth is, teenagers are decent human beings. I'm pretty sure you know very well that the choices you make now will affect the rest of your life. You don't need to hear this every single day. There's not a single teenager out there who aspires to live a life of regret.

For many it sucks to be a teenager. Treated like a child, expected to act like an adult.

Well, I've written this book to show you it doesn't have to suck. And when it does, there's some cool things you can do to make it suck a little less. See, you're not a child and you're not quite a proper adult yet either. You're a teenager.

When I was 11, I thought life would be better when I was a teenager. At 13, I couldn't wait to be 15. At 15, I was chasing 17. And at 17, I just wanted to be 21.

It all moves so fast and many of us are in such a hurry to grow up that we forget what it means to be young. Many are so focussed on the future that they forget to enjoy where they're at, right now.

What's the rush? Slow down.

In fact, let's slow down so much for a moment and put things firmly in reverse. . . .

Thiiiiiiiiis Much Excited!

Think back to when you were 5 years old. Everything was magic. Even school, right from day 1.

I was reminded of this when my own son started school.

'YOU'VE GOT A SON, GAV?! JUST HOW OLD ARE YOU?' We'll get to this later. . . .

My son's name is Kian and at only 5 years of age he served up a perfect – and very much needed – lesson in life. And I'll never forget it.

His first day at school was, bizarrely, a Friday. It was a two-hour taster visit and then he'd start his first full day the following week. I woke up on the Monday of that week to discover Kian stood beside me at 6 am dressed in full school uniform. I reminded him that his first day was in fact Friday.

'I know,' he replied firmly, 'can't you tell what I'm doing?'

I thought about it and replied, 'No idea!'

'I'm practising.'

He practised on Tuesday, he practised on Wednesday and of course on Thursday. He forgot on the actual Friday, but we'll let him off as he was knackered from all his early mornings, but that's not the point.

I woke him on Friday, and he leaped out of bed, threw his uniform on and came sprinting into our room. My wife and I smiled weary early-morning-parenting smiles.

I told Kian that I'd never seen him this excited before in his entire life. He agreed wholeheartedly.

'That's because I've never been this excited in my entire life.'

There was a brief pause before he delivered the best bit.

'And I've been alive for five years!'

'In fact Dad, I'll show you how excited I am. I am THIIIIIS MUCH EXCITED!'

Please picture a 5-year-old with his arms stretched so wide they're almost touching behind his back. Shoulder blades touching.

As a teenager, you can probably remember being 5. Pretty much everything's exciting at that age, so to be beyond 'normal' excitement and to have ventured into 'THIIIIIS much excited' – we're in 'Christmas Eve/Disneyland' territory. Or 'Disneyland on Christmas Eve' territory, something of which I have never experienced but I can begin to imagine just how exciting this is.

That morning, my wife and I had a wonderful discussion about how, in that moment, there were thousands of young kids all waking up feeling the same – buzzing, pumped and ready to go. Raring to throw themselves into the next step of life's adventure. The same adventure that you're still on.

We continued to talk about how amazing it is that some people remain like that throughout life. Every single step of the journey, we meet them, the infectious energy they have, the buzz.



And then we had a really weird discussion about how some people never feel like that again. Something goes, fizzles out, vanishing entirely for some.

Could it be that some people peak at 5?

There is, of course, a downside to taking the next step in your adventure. Fear. Worry. Stress. Anxiety. You are excited and yet it's tinged with what might go wrong. It might not work. Failure is an actual thing. You know because, as a teenager, you've experienced it.

But when you're 4 or 5 these feelings can be somewhat new and confusing.

Fee-Fi-Fo-Fum

So there I was, week 1 of Primary School. Five years old and learning to fit in, whatever that means.

It was Friday, the final day of week 1. My school experience so far had been outstanding. New friends, old friends, Hide 'n' Seek and as much 'Heads Down Thumbs Up' as I could possibly imagine.

Magic.

We came back into the class after Playtime fresh from a game of 'Tig'. The Head Teacher, Miss Smart (real name) popped in for a chat.

'Good Morning boys and girls.'

'Gooooood Mmmmmooooorrning Miiiiiss Smart.'

Miss Smart was about to tell us something that would be a game changer for me.

‘Boys and girls, for the first time ever, this Christmas, we are going to put on a school pantomime.’

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. A pantomime, in my new school. I loved pantomime.

‘Not only are we putting on a pantomime boys and girls but we need some of *you* to be in it.’

Well, this just about sent me over the edge. My school were putting on a pantomime and some of us were going to be in it! I couldn’t wait to tell my mum and dad.

‘The Pantomime we will be doing this year is Jack & The Beanstalk.’

My absolute favourite pantomime ever. I could see it in my mind. The giant’s enormous mechanical legs walking across the stage as ‘fee-fi-fo-fum’ rings out across the theatre.

‘We need 5 pupils from this class to be the mice who run on stage every night and steal the giant’s cheese.’

Mind. Blown.



I was imagining myself sitting in the audience with snacks-a-plenty. I could see the mice, the cheese and again, the giant’s legs. And me. I could picture it. It was going to be hilarious.

I was experiencing an excitement I had never felt before. A rush of pure adrenaline that felt magic. It was new to me, and I liked it. I liked it a lot.

Throughout life we are presented with opportunities. I was about to be presented with one that would ultimately shape my entire life. I kid you not, what happens next changed everything for me.

Remember, I was 5.

'Hands up if you want to be one of the mice in the pantomime?'

My hand was up the second she even began to say the word 'hands'. Imagine the fastest hand in the world. My hand was faster than this. Look at your own hand right now (I dare you). Go on, look at it and move it up in to the air as fast as you can. So, the speed at which you just moved is amateur compared to the speed I moved my entire arm this day as a five year old. Try again . . . still too slow. I was an actual ninja.

'Gavin Oattes.'

She picked me! This was it; this was my moment.

'Your hand was up first; do you want to be a mouse?'



All of a sudden I could picture the audience from the stage. It was like the camera in my head spun around 180 degrees. Now there were hundreds of people sitting watching me.

What if it went wrong? What if they didn't enjoy it? What if I wasn't good enough? What if no one turned up?

'Everything you want is on the other side of fear.'

—Jack Canfield

Where were all these questions coming from?

My wonderful feeling of unbelievable excitement turned to a much lesser wonderful feeling of unbelievable fear. I was scared, but this was not a scared I had ever felt before. This was new and I didn't like it.

My heart started to pound. I could hear the blood passing through my ears, my chest felt like it was crunching gears and my heart was racing faster than ever before. Shaking, nausea, numbness and of course impending doom.

I was 5. I just wanted to be a mouse, I really did. More than anything in the world, but something, something deep inside was stopping me.

It felt like I was going to be sick. My stomach hurt. This was a horrendous feeling of what I now know to be anxiety and what I came to discover as 'caring way too much about what people think of me.'

Now at this moment it's important for me to be clear on something. . . .

There are moments in life you should absolutely care. You really should, but only about things that set your soul on fire. As a human you need to save your energy for magical moments.

'Do you want to be a mouse?' Miss Smart repeated.

Again, all I could see was the audience staring back at me. All of a sudden I knew what it meant to be a worrier.

'No thanks, I only put my hand up because I need to go to the toilet.'

Everyone laughed. I can distinctly remember thinking 'Something's wrong, something's wrong, something's wrong' over and over again.

My teacher stepped in. . . .

'Are you sure Gavin, you seemed awfully excited.'

I had to get out. I repeated myself.

'I only put my hand up because I need to go to the toilet.'

'Ok then, on you go,' she said as I ran out the door.

I ran all the way to the toilet, ran into a cubicle, locked the door and burst into tears. I had never felt like this before. Five years old and I felt like my world had come to an end.

Why was I feeling like this over a pantomime?

Might seem a little over dramatic but to put this into a 5 year old's perspective, it was my absolute dream to be in a pantomime. I had always wanted to be in one. This was my magical moment. I had my chance and I blew it.

Because I was scared.

Seven years of primary school passed and not once did I set foot on a stage. Not once did I volunteer for anything that involved possible public humiliation.

That moment has stuck with me forever. I allowed the fear to get the better of me. That day affected my confidence for a very long time. It still does.

Then came high school. By this point I knew one day I'd be on the stage. Even with all the fears and all my anxieties, I just knew.

But, I continued to turn down every chance I had to get up and perform, I was so worried about what others might think. I didn't pick drama and no matter how much I wanted to, I didn't audition for school shows. More opportunities passed. Even reading aloud from a book in class became an issue for me. My face would turn bright red and my classmates would laugh.

'Oattesie's taking a beamer,' they would say. You'll know how much this can knock a teenager's confidence, even if done in jest.

Every day I dreamed of being on stage, performing and entertaining for hundreds (maybe thousands one day) of people in a theatre. It was the first thing I thought of in the morning and the last thing at night.

By 15 years of age, I was obsessed with comedy. Stand-up comedy, comedy films, TV shows, books, basically anything that was really silly and made me laugh. I would sit in my room at night writing comedy sketches, filling notebook after notebook with all the nonsense stored in my brain.



Maybe one day I would get to share this nonsense with the world.

Just one problem. I was still terrified by the thought of being on stage.

Navel-Gazing

I reckon people are a bit like belly buttons. Some of us are introverts (innies), some of us are extroverts (outies) and some are somewhere in the middle (inbetweenies).

It doesn't matter who you are, where you're from or what anyone else thinks of you. You are allowed to believe in you. You are allowed to be confident in you. You are allowed to step out of your comfort zone and when you spot an opportunity that looks and feels right, grab on with two hands, keep your feet on the ground and run as fast as you can.

If you don't then one day you might just look back and wonder, what if?

Just one thing. You are also allowed to be scared. It's normal.

So to the Innies, Outies and Inbetweenies, all of you, you're all wonderful. And beautiful. And weird. And magical.

Yeah, all of you.

Life goes by in a blur. We need to stop the navel-gazing and go make things happen.



I can remember teachers at school telling me to get my head out of the clouds. I think children should be encouraged to get their heads *back* in the clouds. *Teenagers* need to get their heads back in the clouds too, I need to get my head back in the clouds and the chances are *you* need to get your head back in the clouds. And start dreaming again. Like, proper dreaming, not sleep dreams. Actual proper big dreams that excite you and get your heart racing. The kind of thing that gets you out of bed with an extra spring in your step.



The problem most of us have in achieving our dreams is our thinking. Our thinking helps us to quit, to not try. We've all felt it.

But it's our thinking, and only our thinking, that will help us to succeed.

Dear Parents,
Remember when you started
to want your own independence?
Guess where I'm at in life?

Kind regards,

Your Teenager

_____ X

So, what about you? Did you wake up this morning feeling THIIIIIS much excited?

How often do you wake up on a Monday morning pumped, buzzing and raring to go? Are you waking up every single day energized, happy, driven and oozing passion?

I'm not talking about some days or most days, I mean EVERY SINGLE DAY! If your answer is 'No' then there's a word for people like you: normal. It's absolutely normal. It's normal to not wake up every day genuinely pumped full of energy, buzzing, raring to go. When you go to school it's normal too. And when you start working, it's normal there as well. It's normal for a school to NOT have all their young people waking up every morning fit to burst with excitement at the prospect of Pythagoras' Theorem. If you skip into school 'oozing with passion', someone's going to be making you a doctor's appointment.

Think about this for a moment. It's normal. You're normal. It is now the norm to NOT have people waking up energized, buzzing and raring to go to school or work. To go do the things they have chosen to do, every single day. I'm going to say it once more. It's normal. And it doesn't sit well with me.

Question: Do you want 'normal'?

I'm willing to put money on it that every single one of you reading this book absolutely categorically do NOT want normal. I'm willing to wager that you are in fact looking for, working for, hoping for, striving for, dreaming about something absolutely extraordinary. Something exciting, engaging, purposeful, colourful – even a little bit scary? Something that makes a difference. Something that makes you feel THIIIIIS much excited. And *that* dear reader, makes you not normal.

Question: Are you putting in the effort to achieve it?

Can you imagine what would happen if you woke up every single day with the same fire in your belly for the day ahead that you had when you were 4? It would be extraordinary. Abnormal even. But can you imagine what you'd achieve? And how you'd feel? And the impact you'd have on the normal? It's a mix of frightening and enlightening, but in the most beautiful way you could ever imagine. Moreover, it's a mindset. A choice. And it costs nothing.

“ I tried to be
normal once.

Worst two minutes
of my life.”

—*Anon*

Ready Salted

Let me share with you my favourite quote of all time. We all love a good motivational quote. Everyone does. It's incredible how powerful a few positive words can be. There's a lot of quotes in this book, all quite different from the norm, but you've probably started to work out that neither this book or I for that matter are particularly normal.

And for the record, I'm very comfortable with not being normal. I wasn't for a very long time. I reckon my '2,555 days of WTAF' consisted mainly of desperately trying to fit in and yet somewhat confusingly trying to determine how to stand out.

My conclusion?

Normal is boring.

Anyway, back to my quote!

This quote is by none other than Macauley Culkin. I'm pretty sure you'll know who Macauley is; if you don't, he was the wee boy in the *Home Alone* movies. Well, he was in the first two. I'm not sure if you even know that there are other *Home Alone* movies? Probably best to just stick with the first two. . . .

So yeah, we're starting a book for teenagers with Kevin. Kevin McAllister to be exact. The cute, cheeky and street-savvy 8-year-old that lit up our lives with booby-traps, mischief and a lovely cheese pizza just for him. Apparently – according to his cousin – 'he's what the French call les incompetents'.

Now, whether you are a fan of the *Home Alone* franchise or not, it's fair to say Kevin was anything but incompetent. He took us all on a

journey, an exciting adventure that ultimately reminded us of the importance of love, bravery, family and making the most of what we have. Oh, and not relying on technology, particularly to wake us up before a flight!

The quote goes as follows:

'I've yet to find a level of enthusiasm that tops

"Holy shit look at this giant potato chip!"

—Macaulay Culkin

I love it.

Why?

Because it's true.



It doesn't matter what age you are, where you're from or what type of upbringing you've had. If you are sitting eating a bag of crisps and you pull from it a giant piece of fried potato, it makes your day! It puts a great big smile on your face. But not just yours!

Because, in that moment you turn to everyone else in the room and show it off. And you put a great big smile on their faces too. I'm not sure if you've ever realised this, but whenever you find any massive item of food, you always use your face as a comparative measuring tool.

'LOOK MUM, IT'S THE SIZE OF MY FACE!'

And of course, if there's no one else in the room, what do we do? Yup, we reach for our phones, take a quick pic and its on Snapchat, Tik Tok, Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and whatever else there is these days for the whole world to see.

I guess I love the idea of being able to reach into an entirely normal moment, an everyday situation, and pull from it something that puts a smile on your face, lifts you, excites you or makes you laugh. But so much so you need to share it with others.

And that's my challenge to you with this book. Treat it as your very own big metaphorical bag of crisps and reach in. Pull from it something. *Something* is always a good starting point. It might not be the something you expected, it might be something small, something new or it might just be something that sets your soul on fire. It might be something that makes you laugh, makes you cry, it might even make you angry. But whatever you pull from this book, make sure it's something worth sharing with the world.

I had no plans to mention Macaulay Culkin, but ultimately his quote above is what this book is all about. Seeing the beauty and wonder in everything. Even the ordinary, the every day. Even a giant potato chip. It's about simplicity and appreciating all that's around you. Allowing ourselves to be excited at life, what it throws us, everything. It's about grit, bravery and passion. It's about rediscovering that childlike wonder, living in the moment, getting through all sorts of challenges and yes, having fun, lots of it, always.

I mentioned earlier that nobody is normal. But *being* a teenager is. And yet there is *nothing* normal about our teenage years.

So, this book isn't normal, you're not normal, I'm not normal, but being a teenager is entirely normal.

Confused? Good, yet another trait of being a successful teenager!

**“You’re a ghost
driving a meat
covered skeleton made
from stardust, what
do you have to be
scared of?”**

—Anon

Blow Your Own Mind for a Change!

We're born, we live and then we die. Now only two of these are really guaranteed. If you're reading this now, then you've definitely been born, which in itself – as previously mentioned – is extraordinary.

And guess what? You're *definitely* going to die. Again, blunt. But true.

Being born is mind-blowing, but it's easy. Not for Mum obviously, she does all the work, you did absolutely nothing. Like dying, it just happens. Neither are particularly pleasant or enjoyable for anyone but for the individual on their way in or out, easy-peasy.

But do you believe in life after delivery?

I've already said it, life can be rubbish. It requires energy and effort. It can feel like a chore but the more skilled at it we become, the better at it we get and the happier we feel.

We all have different thoughts and opinions when it comes to living our best life and what that even means. That's what keeps the world exciting, we're all different. But really, who has actually nailed living? Has anyone truly perfected life?

Nope, of course not. But we can give a go! And when better to give life a damn good go than in your teens.

Think back to when you were a wee kid and you saw your teacher *outside* of school, perhaps in the supermarket or in a restaurant. Remember how it made you feel? It was always one of life's real 'WOW' moments. It was exciting, mind-blowing, weird and incredibly warming all at once. And it kinda made us feel on edge a little.

This is how being a teenager can feel, sometimes daily. Why? Because being a teenager is exciting, mind-blowing, weird and incredibly warming.

And guess what? It kinda makes us feel on edge a little. This isn't just felt by teenagers though, this is what truly being alive should *always* feel like.

You're not 4 or 5 anymore. No one is expecting you to wake up every day buzzing. Now, depending on where you are from, the word 'buzzing' has many different meanings, but you know what I mean.

I'm talking about ping-pong out of bed with excitement and enthusiasm every single day, raring to go!

In most other books about teenagers, it's here they would present to you a whole bunch of science and aim to educate you all about your brain, demonstrating the changes that happen, in turn leading to the fact you no longer jump out of bed every morning excited about going for a poo and eating cereal.

But I told you this book is like you, it's not normal. So, instead, some more questions. . . .

Are you happy most of the time?

I'm going with 'most of the time' as we simply cannot be happy *all* the time.

Is there a great big, enormous fire in your belly for life?

What's the point in even having a belly if there's no fire in it, right? Think back to you when you were about 4 years old. The fire was stoked daily. Everything was exciting.

Experts tell us life is all about being in the moment, making the most of now, not worrying about the future and living life in the present. But you get to wrap that present up however you want it. Sounds a bit cheesy but life is like wrapping a present. Sometimes it just folds beautifully without even trying. That moment the scissors glide as if by magic and the sticky tape tears beautifully.

Then there's the moments where the paper creases, the scissors tear the paper, you've got the whole roll of tape stuck to the present, it's not folding anything like it should be but you're so past caring you just accept it for what it is. Then to add insult to injury, you've not measured it out properly, so you need to cut another piece and patch it up. You've half-assed it and for now it will have to do.

At 18 years of age, still scared, I finally decided to wrap my present up the way I had always dreamt. If there was ever a job for someone terrified of crowds, public humiliation and other people's opinions it certainly wasn't the world of comedy. So, naturally, I booked myself a gig, put myself on a stage and became a stand-up comedian. . . .

I did my first gig. It felt incredible. Over the last 20 years I have performed all over the world. Good gigs, terrible gigs, great gigs. So many ups and downs. I've met the most wonderful people and the main thing I have learned is this.

If you're faced with an opportunity that's both terrifying and amazing, then you should totally go for it.

Welcome to life. Teenage life. The weirdest 7 years you'll ever have. Terrifying and amazing. My challenge to you is to wrap your 7 years up however the hell you want to. Stop pretending to be normal, embrace

your inner weird, never grow up, be you and be sure that for your 7 years, you act your age. Literally.

'No matter what you do, in the beginning it's going to suck, because you suck. But you'll get better, and you'll suck less. And as you keep doing this, eventually you'll suck so little, you'll actually be good.'

—Garrett J. White
