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PART ONE: CHAPTER 1

GROWING UP BRANSON

By Holly Branson

Dear Holly and Sam,

Life can seem rather unreal at times. Alive and well and loving one day. No longer there the next.

As you both know I always had an urge to live life to the full . . . I loved every minute of it and I especially loved every second of my time with both of you and mum.

I know that many people thought us foolish for embarking on this latest adventure. I was convinced they were wrong . . . I thought that the risks were acceptable. Obviously I've been proved wrong.

However, I regret nothing about my life except not being with Joan to finally help you grow up. By the ages of twelve and fifteen your characters have already

developed. We're both so proud of you. Joan and I couldn't have two more delightful kids.

You are both kind, considerate, full of life (even witty!). What more could we both want?

Be strong. I know it won't be easy. But we've had a wonderful life together and you'll never forget all the good times we've had.

Live life to its full yourselves. Enjoy every minute of it. Love and look after Mum as if she's both of us.

I love you,
Dad

I attempted to read this for the first time on the day my dad's autobiography *Losing My Virginity* was published—but tears prevented me reading beyond the first paragraph. My dad is known for many things, from businessman to philanthropist and in this case adventurer and he'd written this letter in case he didn't survive his latest round-the-world attempt in a hot-air balloon. He survived. Characteristically, Dad forgot to give me and my brother Sam the heads-up that he would open his first book with what might have been his last written words to us. So it came as a bit of a shock, especially as we hadn't seen it before! Richard Branson may well be a world-famous name, but to me he's just Dad.

It is bizarre writing about yourself, like talking in the third person. You have to ask difficult questions and to some extent bare your soul. In the first of many writing sessions for this book, Craig had already hit a nerve. We'd discussed my childhood, medical school, my experiences at Virgin—then Craig turned to me: "Holly, the most important question of all now. What do you want your legacy to the world to be?"

I looked at him stricken, knowing full well that if I asked him the same thing he'd say something off the top of his head that was succinct and annoyingly brilliant.

My mind was spinning with the things I should be saying, like driving Virgin forward in changing business for good, embedding purpose into the heart of the company, making an impact in the world through our foundations. But all I wanted to say was: I want to be a mum. That my dream is to raise a healthy, happy, kind, well-grounded family with my husband, Freddie.

Craig couldn't have known that Freddie and I had spent more than two difficult and distressing years trying to conceive. After two miscarriages and two failed rounds of IVF, we were starting to wonder if we would ever get to be parents.

I decided to be honest, not about my fertility struggles, but about the fact that I wanted my legacy to be having a family that cares about the world at large. That more than anything, coming from families as close as ours, I wanted Freddie and me to have the opportunity to instill the same value systems and love of life, of people and planet, that our parents had instilled in us. Kids who believe they can make a real difference in the world. We wanted to mentor our kids in the same way we were mentored by our parents.

Mom, Dad, Sam . . . and Dreams of Being a Doctor

I am called Holly because I was supposed to come into the world at Christmas. Family legend has it that my arrival six weeks early found my dad sleeping off the previous night's party. My mum, Joan, by then in contractions, had to manhandle him out of bed and into the car. Luckily, they made it to the hospital in time!

My mum, born Joan Templeman, was raised in the center of Glasgow, Scotland, worked in a pawnbroker's shop, and, later, at a London bric-a-brac store on the Portobello Road. It was there that my dad first fell in love with her and, without putting too fine a point on it, essentially stalked her. He turned up at the shop every day for months, buying stuff he didn't want or need. The rest, as they say, is history.

Sam and I had a normal, loving childhood—thanks in the largest part to our wonderful mum. She was the one who took my younger brother and me to the playground and walked us to and from school every day. A stay-at-home mum who was (and still is) always there with a hug, inspiring words of wisdom, and a beautiful, welcoming smile. She is our anchor, the calm voice that acts as a complementary balance to our very energetic father.

Dad was also ever present, camped out on a sofa at one end of the sitting room, first on the houseboat, then in our Holland Park home, orchestrating the growth of Virgin while we tore about under his feet. I called my parents Joan and Richard until I was 11—as that's what everyone who worked for Virgin called them.

Virgin and home life were never separate for Sam and me. We were used to people coming and going, constant phone calls, the beeps of fax machines, paper everywhere. We ran riot in the offices of the wonderful Virgin staff. They never seemed to mind—which was not really surprising given that my old nursery ended up being the Virgin Press Office. We had no idea that the people coming and going to meetings were the likes of the Rolling Stones, Janet Jackson, the boss of Boeing, or a distraught bank manager (on more than one occasion). It was fun and relaxed and—to us—totally normal.

Dad was (and still is) open, honest, and unafraid to ask questions or seek advice—even from his children. We saw him listen much more than he talked. In a nutshell, he taught us to be independent, which I know at times, like many a parent, he regretted—especially when there were four of us involved in making decisions, rather than just one! Later in the book we look at putting your people first and building your trust bank—much of which I learned from my mum and dad at our kitchen table.

Even growing up in the buzz of the family business, I'd always wanted to be a doctor. Childhood dreams of extensive learning and saving lives seemed best indulged within the medical profession. Mum remembers asking me about my ambitions when I was three. I answered unequivocally: "I'd like to be a doctor." Our next-door neighbor and dear friend Peter Emerson was a doctor and I was struck by his fantastic calm in any crisis, like the time I stuck my finger in a blender as an

inquisitive child. The blood and gore didn't phase him one bit—to a child like me that made a doctor the coolest thing on the planet.

Growing up knowing what I wanted to be was brilliant because I knew right away which subjects I'd have to take and what grades I needed to get, so my academic career was already mapped out. In the UK, where at age 15 students must strictly narrow the focus of their studies, this was a huge advantage and a lot less stressful than it was for my friends who had no idea what they wanted to end up doing careerwise. I'd always loved biology, and though chemistry gave me trouble, I could manage it. I loved being around people, especially children, and so I dreamed of being a pediatrician. Having that rigorous structure imposed in order to work toward a goal made me a studious young girl.

Except on Necker Island . . . where Sam and I embraced our inner Pirates of the Caribbean.

Sam is nearly four years younger than me, and was my constant childhood companion. We tobogganed down stairways on mattresses and built a makeshift zip line in our backyard, but we had our best adventures on Necker. My parents bought Necker Island, one of the easternmost Virgin Islands, in 1979 for $180,000, and we spent every summer, Christmas, and Easter there. It was the world's greatest playground. Sam and I built sandcastle cities, stowed castaways, staved off pirates, and pillaged for gold, which to most adults looked like seashells.

During our family holidays on Necker, Sam and I would pester our unmarried parents about their different surnames. Finally, one day, Dad took me aside. "Would it be okay if I asked your mum to marry me?" he asked. "Dad," I worried, "what if she says, 'No'?" He had more confidence in her enthusiasm for the idea than I apparently did. My parents were married on Necker on December 20, 1989.

Twenty-two years later to the day, in the same spot on Necker, I married my high-school sweetheart amidst the ruins of the great house that had burned to the ground after a lightning strike, during a hurricane, a couple of months before.

Our romance all started with a family member's hopeless sense of direction. Our arrival at St. Edward's School in Oxford came about by chance one weekend when our family went to the wrong school for an

open day; we intended to visit a neighboring school but took a left turn instead of a right. Immediately, we fell in love with the architecture and the open culture of the students.

Among its other plus points, St. Edward's featured boys; my previous schools had not. Founded in 1863 to educate the sons of Anglican clergy, the school didn't become fully coed until 1997, the year I walked through its doors. So, not only did St. Edward's have boys, it had a lot of them: six for every one of the 20 girls enrolled in my year.

Among them was Freddie Andrewes—a tall, handsome, blond-haired boy I came to know better during geography field trips. We became good friends that first year then got together at a party. Smart, charming, and sporty—little did I know he was the man I would marry many years later on Necker. It's strange when I think of it now, but if not for a wrong turn, Freddie and I may never have met.

St. Edward's also introduced me to the rewards of community service. Our academic program required either volunteer service or cadet training. I chose to volunteer as a teacher's assistant at a school for autistic children. Many of the kids were severely affected by the developmental disorder, which, among other things, can make it difficult to look others in the eye. Some researchers believe that eye contact helps with social interactions, so I taught this through clapping games and working with blocks. My natural inclination is to comfort with a hug, so I struggled at first with how to handle these children, many of whom resist touch and process their emotions much differently from the way I do when they are upset. Although difficult at times, the experience was tremendously rewarding.

Children have the most amazing ability to teach adults the true joy of being alive. They delight in the smallest of things. They look at the world through innocent eyes filled with hope, even when they have experienced great loss and struggles. After I graduated from St. Edward's, I was extremely privileged and excited to work with young children again, this time in Africa.

It was there that I met the most wonderful little boy.

Kelvin was a confident, cheeky, chatty little boy. I met him during my gap year between boarding school and medical school when I was an 18-year-old volunteer at an orphanage in Nairobi, Kenya. Kelvin

was one of about 200 children living there. He'd follow me around and seize me by the leg, or grab me by the hand to show me his bed or his best friend or his favorite hiding place. He was seven years old, with a lightning grin and eyes bright with both mischief and intelligence.

His peers were apprehensive about newcomers and shied away from those, like me, who came into their lives for months at a time to teach English or to drill them in math. Kelvin didn't suffer from shyness. He loved nothing more than to stir up trouble and rally fellow students to his cause. My best defense against classroom mayhem turned out to be my digital camera, which in the year 2000 was still something of a novelty. When things got out of hand, I'd offer to photograph the children if they agreed to settle down. Kelvin filled my memory card with frame after frame of breakdance poses, zany smiles, and intense close-ups of his eyes and ears and teeth.

He was a marvel of mirth and resilience. No one knew for certain what had happened to his parents, but given the momentum of the HIV/AIDS epidemic at the time, it was easy to guess. In 1990, fewer than one million children in sub-Saharan Africa had lost one or both parents to HIV/AIDS. By 2010, it was more than 15 million.[1]

I wanted to adopt Kelvin. I wanted to take him home to a supportive family, to "fix" things by evacuating him from his circumstances. At 18 years old, my plan was impractical. My reaction to a global epidemic that had left millions orphaned, my instinct to help, had been to pick up one boy and run.

My dad was keen, but it was my level-headed mother who finally convinced me that, at 18 and about to enter medical school, I was in no position to take on a seven-year-old. We decided that the best way to help was to sponsor Kelvin and his education. I cried all the way back to London—my heart breaking but also bursting with joy at my incredible luck to have met a little boy whose eyes shone with hope and the wonder of life in the face of adversity.

Several years later I had my very own brush with the fear of HIV.

I graduated from medical school at University College London in 2008. During my first week on the job as a qualified doctor, I was drawing a blood sample from a patient in the hospital with a urological

issue. I went to cover the needle with a safety catch and then—I'm still not sure what happened—the needle pricked my finger. When I peeled off my glove, blood was oozing up in a neat little dot from where the needle had pierced my skin. I snatched the patient's file: female, early 30s, intravenous drug user, Hepatitis-C carrier, high risk for HIV/AIDS, never been tested.

As a nurse or doctor in a hospital, we all know the risks, which are actually pretty high, but we are trained to know what to do should something like this happen. But for that hour or so, immediately after the needle pierces the skin, you can't help feeling crippled by fear. A tearful call to Freddie calmed me down. Always practical, Freddie reminded me there was very little I could do but take the prescribed course of treatment and just get on with life rather than worry myself sick. He was right of course (but don't ever tell him that!).

I was prescribed a powerful cocktail of antiretroviral drugs known as postexposure prophylaxis (PEP) that lower the risk of contracting the virus. If HIV had entered my bloodstream, it would take between a few hours and a few days before it permanently infected me. The drugs can prevent permanent infection, but left me terribly nauseous. When the patient's test came back negative, I discontinued treatment. Due to the diagnostic procedure, it would be six months before doctors could tell me whether I had been infected with Hepatitis-C. For six months, I both had and didn't have Hep-C. Work at the hospital was all-consuming, so it was possible to keep the anxiety boxed into one corner of my mind. Thankfully, my blood tests came back negative, but the incident taught me firsthand what it felt like to be a patient. To put myself in other people's shoes who have no control over their fate was not only humbling but also inspired me forward on my journey to help others.

Mind the Gap

My life as a 27-year-old was full, rewarding, and exciting: I'd signed on as medic in a race across the Atlantic on a stripped-down sailboat, treated a cardiac patient in-flight at 30,000 feet, and completed arduous

rounds at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital with my newly minted medical degree; I'd achieved my life's ambition, or so I thought. . . .

There was never one day, one moment, when I resolved to leave medicine. Rather, it was a step-by-step process—a series of small decisions. My transition really began at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital where I discovered that surgery was not my calling. I preferred drawn-out conversations; I preferred to use my bedside manner while the patient was conscious. So when I found out that year two of my medical rotation would be predominantly surgery—young doctors receive a random allocation of duties in Britain—I knew that this would be my only opportunity to defer my studies for a year in the hope that when I reapplied I would find myself on a different medical specialty.

I spent months asking advice from my tutors, fellow doctors, friends, Freddie, and of course family before I finally made the decision to take a year out of medicine. What's a year, after all?

And that's how I found myself in Dad's office (a.k.a.: the sofa at home), sitting across from him and listening to his "year-long" job offer.

Dad had never put pressure on Sam or me to go into the business, but he also never made it a secret that he'd love nothing more than to share his passion with us. It's impossible not to get swept up by Dad's galloping enthusiasms, and Sam and I grew up with the Virgin team being part of our family.

My dad has always believed that "screwing business as usual" will have to become the new norm if we want to avoid running out of room and resources on this planet. Social issues of great magnitude can only be solved when government, nonprofits, and the private sector work together. Old-school charities don't have the resources to grow their impact on their own. Governments have only so much tax revenue. As the only sector with enough resources for scalability, business should take the lead. Traditionally, the purpose of business has been to maximize shareholder value at any cost, a mandate that often justified crimes against people and the environment. In the past, people and planet were rarely economic measurements in

the success or failure of a business. But when, in some instances, companies are more powerful than governments, business cannot see itself as separate from the health of our world and its people but responsible for it.

I wanted to write this book, in part, to show from my experiences at Virgin that business can facilitate unlikely partnerships between governments, commerce, and the social sector, using the market as a lever for social change. Thankfully, as they touch millions of people's lives with products and services, companies across the world are waking up to these possibilities, and to their wider responsibility. As Dad would say, "business should make lives better."

When a company leads by example with more progressive social practices, it can alter consumer expectations and force competitors to adopt new strategies, causing a ripple effect that changes market demands and ultimately changes the world for the better.

I had the chance to work for one of those businesses. To join one of the world's biggest, most progressive companies and work toward change on a much larger scale.

How could I turn down an opportunity to be a part of that?

All of a sudden the year had gone by, and I wasn't ready to reapply for a new medical rotation when the time came. I deferred my hospital return to continue along the learning curve at Virgin. I'd started my new job the way most people do these days—with an internship, rotating through all of our larger companies, including Virgin Atlantic, Virgin Money, Virgin Media, and Virgin Trains. Accounting and balance sheets gave me trouble, so I went back to school to get a better handle on them. After a year I wanted to learn more. After two years I knew I needed to learn even more. After three years I finally admitted to myself that I would not be returning to medicine.

During my first few months at Virgin, I was encouraged, challenged, pushed—alongside a passionate team—to come up with ideas and practices that would ensure that our business was a force for good. We were tasked with driving forward a strategy for Virgin that formalized Dad's gut instinct that business was best placed to answer some of the world's most difficult social problems. For years, my dad and his trusted colleagues had built a business based on people and culture,

engaging employees in a social mission that permeated every aspect of the business without sacrificing the bottom line. We were tasked with ensuring that "business as a force for good" would be THE most important part of Virgin's DNA going forward.

By the end of this book, I hope to have taken you along on the ride of my own learning curve—which in the beginning was steep!

We were tasked with ensuring that "business as a force for good" would be THE most important part of Virgin's DNA going forward.

My Legacy at Home

A little over a year after that first writing session with Craig and Marc, I was sitting in a makeup chair having my baby bump painted to look like a sea turtle. The third round of IVF had worked, and I was well into my third trimester; I was over the moon.

Six months' pregnant with twins, I was surrounded by a group of women there to create a book in aid of vulnerable mothers around the world. The brainchild of the inspiring Sara Blakely (of Spanx fame), the Belly Art Project is a creative way to help elevate awareness for the 303,000 women who die every year as a result of complications related to pregnancy or childbirth, most of which are preventable. All proceeds from the book will go to Every Mother Counts to help at-risk mothers. As we sat there chatting about morning sickness, cravings, and swollen ankles, I thought about how lucky Freddie and I were. And I realized I'd done it. This was our first mother-baby project for charity. My twins would be helping the world from the womb!

A few weeks later at 33 weeks, I was diagnosed with preeclampsia, a hypertensive disorder and one of the most common causes of death during pregnancy for those 303,000 women every year. I needed an emergency C-section. For any mother-to-be, it is a terrifying experience. I know that had I been a mother in a developing country, I may not have survived. I am lucky; Etta and Artie were born December 20, 2014, on my and Freddie's

third wedding anniversary and my parents' twenty-fifth. That date must have a special significance in the stars for my family.

What Became of Kelvin?

The irrepressible Kelvin is now 22 years old (which makes me feel old!) and resides in Kirichwa, Nairobi. I am proud to say he is loving student life at the Kiambu Institute of Science and Technology. He has already earned a certificate in Hospitality Management and will soon begin his diploma qualification in Food and Beverage Production and Sales.

Kelvin has big dreams and has never lost his unstoppable spirit and drive. In the future, he would like to open his own hotel, so that he can support his siblings. Kelvin's passion, and the passion of the many young men and women just like him, confirms my belief that the future of our world is in safe hands.

Virgin Group by the numbers (2017)

43
Million
43+ million followers on social media

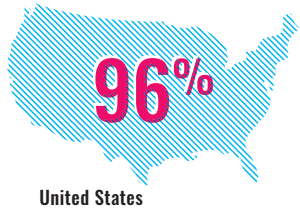
53
Million
Over 60 businesses serving over 53 million customers worldwide

£16.6
Billion
£16.6 billion in annual revenue and growing (as of 2016)

70K
Employees
70,000 employees in 35 countries

Brand recognition:

UK



United States

Australia

South Africa