

Truly Recognizing Everything Is Already There

Before we get a second further into this book, I want you to understand something important from the start: This is *not* a “self-help” book! This is a *self-joy* book. That might not sound much different at first, but let me explain to you how big the difference is.

Self-help books are meant to help you solve problems. The whole genre is based on the idea that something about you is not right. You’re not saying the right things, or doing the right things, or acting the right way. Any self-help book, then, is supposed to help you fix what’s broken—about your life, about your habits, about your relationships. Ultimately, self-help books are meant to fix you.

That’s not this book. In fact, this book is just the opposite.

Self-joy is not about fixing you; it’s about celebrating you. It’s not about discovering what’s wrong about you; it’s about discovering everything that’s right about you.

The problem isn’t with you at all. The problem is all the ways we women are made to feel throughout our lives, all the social

pressures and constraints we face that, over time, erode our sense of self, deplete our self-esteem, and eventually make us lose sight of what's most important in life—ourselves.

So this book is not about fixing anything about you. It's about discovering—or maybe rediscovering—what's always been so special about you. It's about finding what's already there to savor and celebrate about you and your life.

That's what TREAT means: **T**ruly **R**ealizing **E**verything is **A**lready **T**here. It is! We just must take the time to find it.

I wanted to write this book because I know firsthand what it's like to lose sight of yourself. I know what it's like to constantly feel less than, to feel forever inferior on the inside even when everything might look fine—even great—on the outside. That's part of the struggle, right? Women are always supposed to keep everything together—ourselves, our families, our relationships, our careers. Regardless of what it is we're doing, regardless of what's going on in our lives, the expectation is we should always look our best, act our best, be our best—but at the same time, we should never look so good that we make others feel insecure, and we should never act in a way that outshines those around us.

Yes, we have made so much progress in so many ways, in education, in sports, in business. The problem is, we're still not supposed to enjoy it. Despite all the gains, we're still, at the end of the day, supposed to be putting everything and everyone ahead of ourselves. Nobody outright says that anymore, but I think most any woman still hears that message loud and clear. My hope is

that this book will allow you to start putting yourself first, seeing yourself first, and treating yourself in a way that allows you to experience the joy of being yourself. You're worth it!

So let me start by sharing a bit of my story with you, my journey to understanding the importance of treats. I wish I could say it's like a movie where the main character struggles in the beginning and then there's a nice, neat, straight line to a happy, blissful, everything-is-amazing ending. I wish I could say that, but my story, just like yours, is real. And our real-life stories don't have one clear arc that gets tied up in a pretty bow at the end. Life is messy. It's full of zigs and zags, ups and downs, stops and starts. So my story is that—complex and incomplete. And I'm okay with that—which is a treat.

My Life Without Treats

Even as a little girl, I was very hard on myself. I was a total perfectionist from the start, the type of kid who wanted to get straight A's. I was in dance classes from a very young age, and I had that perfectionistic dancer mentality. I was very organized, very rigid, very structured. Dance fed into that. Precision in dance is key, and I strove to get each move, each dance, exactly right.

Looking back, I can see now that part of all this was an attempt to gain the approval of others—my teachers, my dance instructors, my parents. In some ways I was always a people pleaser, which I think a lot of girls and women can relate to. So I'm left to wonder, who was I trying to get straight A's for, and who was I trying to perfect each dance for?

And it's funny, because it's not as if the adults in my life were demanding I be this way. My mom actually suggested that I needed to relax! When I was graduating high school, she told me, "In college, Kristin, the only thing you need to worry about is drinking a beer and getting laid." How many moms say that to their daughters?! But she knew me. She knew all the pressure I put on myself, and she knew it wasn't healthy.

And don't get me wrong, it's not like I didn't have any fun or do fun things with my girlfriends and stuff like that. It's just that life is full of choices, right? Every day we make tons of choices. And throughout my life, I would typically choose work and discipline over play and relaxing. It's about balance. In yoga, we always talk about the interplay between the effort and the ease. It can't always be one or the other. It's an especially important message for women because I think we are more disposed to the effort part, continually pouring all our energy into doing better and being better—and then we feel guilty if we don't feel like we've accomplished that, if we ease up at all, even for a little bit. But you can't just keep sharpening the knife. In my life, I lacked any type of real, healthy balance. I was always a knife sharpener.

I went through a period of anorexia where I got dangerously thin. I would literally count every single calorie. Rather than eat a full bagel, I would eat only half. I stopped eating lunch with my friends so I wouldn't be tempted to eat more, and so they wouldn't see how little I was eating. But the obsessive calorie counting was just the beginning. If you're a perfectionist, nothing is ever enough. I mean, how do you achieve "perfection"? There's always something more you can do. And so I did. One summer I remember exercising relentlessly. I would ride my

bike to play tennis for an hour, then go swim for an hour, then ride my bike home—and then not eat anything for dinner.

Before anyone realized it, I became severely underweight. I was about 13 years old at the time, when kids are going through puberty and development at varying rates and different times. Some girls look like full-grown women, while others still look like they're in elementary school. So I think that helped mask just how thin I was getting. Eventually my parents forced me to get medical help.

That's when I got really frightened, because the doctors explained how severe anorexia is. When you're barely a teenager and doctors are telling you that your organs could stop working, that you could destroy your reproductive system and never have kids, that if you keep doing what you're doing, you could die—what could be scarier?

But it's not as if it just ended there. There was no magic pill doctors could give me to change how I looked at food and exercise, to change how I looked at myself. It was a daily struggle. My sophomore year of high school, I was still only 79 pounds—skeletal, but that's not what I saw. In my mind, to my eyes, I was still overweight. And that's what's so horrible about body dysmorphia. Your reality is only what you yourself see.

Eventually, I did make changes, but not healthy ones. I went from starving myself to shifting into an unhealthy pattern of overeating. My mom was so nervous about me being so underweight that she would make oatmeal cookies to entice me to eat. But instead of coming home and eating one or two cookies, I would eat 8 or 9 or 10. I lost all my ability to

moderate my behavior and my choices. I had no sense of balance in my life.

Toward the end of high school, I had done so much damage to my body that my thyroid stopped working properly, and I ended up gaining a whole bunch of weight. The ultimate irony is that I spent all my adolescence starving myself, never in my mind feeling thin enough, but ended up graduating high school and entering college overweight. As I began this new phase of my life, I felt just as down on myself, maybe even more than ever before.

My Awakening to Treats

In college, I began to gain some perspective. I started to better understand who I was and what I wanted, and to develop strategies for helping me put the two together. I entered New York University as a theater major.

My parents met when working on a musical and they were always very creative and musically oriented. When I was little, we moved to Idaho, but there weren't many outlets for art and theater where we lived. So my parents started a group called K.C. and the Sunshine Kids (a playful riff on the 1970s group KC and the Sunshine Band). My family would all perform together, and I loved it—it's one of my fondest memories of childhood. Through all my struggles growing up, theater sustained me. I loved singing and dancing and the connection with the audience and seeing people's face light up when we would perform. It was the absolute best feeling, and it was something I knew I wanted to pursue, which is why I went to NYU.

It was also around this same time that I discovered yoga, which was life-changing. Seriously. Not that everything changed all at once, but I discovered this whole new world. And that new world wasn't some far-off place—that new world was me. Yoga allowed me to see myself, feel myself, in ways I had never been able to before. You can think about it in terms of an onion. Yoga allows you to slowly peel away those dry, brittle outer layers to reveal smoother, sweeter inner layers. The longer I practiced yoga, the more I started to get to know myself better and, I think, treat myself better. And treating yourself better is the key to everything. It affects your relationship with the world around you. Whether it's food, exercise, drinking, working, hobbies, relationships—it all starts with you and how you treat yourself.

In yoga, there's a pose called Savasana, which is kind of like the treat that you get for all your efforts. It's like the milk and cookies you got in kindergarten, or that nap time we started to get rid of as we get older. But as adults—women especially—we don't really allow ourselves those small pleasures. We have an almost supernatural ability to turn pleasure into guilt.

I remember very clearly the first time I allowed myself to lie in Savasana. It was at the end of an hour-long yoga session that completely kicked my butt. I was exhausted. In Savasana, you lie on your back, legs spread comfortably apart, arms resting and relaxed by your side, with your eyes closed, and then you just let go of all tension in your body. So, instead of rushing out to do the next thing on my daily agenda, as I normally would, I just laid there on the mat and simply let go.

I let all the stress and tension release from body, and before I realized it, I found myself crying. I think it was the first time in

my life that I allowed myself that space, that time, that reprieve from all the layers and walls and boundaries that I had built up around myself. My tears weren't of sadness—they were tears of relief, of feeling unburdened, like some weight had been lifted that I never knew was there before. I still struggle to capture that moment properly in words, but I do know this: It was a life-altering moment for me, the first small step in learning how to practice self-compassion. It was my introduction to the concept of TREAT.

What Is a TREAT?

This is a good time to elaborate a bit more on what I mean by treats. As I said, TREAT is an acronym for **T**ruly **R**ealizing **E**verything is **A**lready **T**here. This is incredibly important to understand because I think many of us are taught to look outward for fulfillment in life, never inward. Our culture is full of message telling us we can achieve happiness by finding the right man or the right career or the right look or the right clothes or the right skincare regimen. Happiness, these messages tell us again and again and again, is elsewhere, outside of ourselves.

That's crazy, right? We're sent off on a journey looking for something that's right there inside us all along. It's like looking for the glasses that are right there on your face. So of course we get lost along the way. Who wouldn't? The happiness that we need, the contentment that we desire, must start with realizing that we are the happiness. But to find it, we must search ourselves, not Gucci or Sephora or the latest post on our dating app.

Everything you could possibly ever want, have, or need is right there inside of you. You are in control of your life. You're in control of your own reactions, your own thoughts, your own energy, your own positivity. You have all that you need inside of you. It's just a matter of tapping into that and trusting it and believing in it and getting to know yourself better.

To truly realize everything is already there for your happiness, you need to be able to accept yourself as valuable and worthy of happiness in the first place. That's incredibly hard for many women to do. I still struggle with that to this day. My default feeling is guilt, so I must fight the feelings of guilt whenever I feel joy. Recently, for instance, I was at Canyon Ranch for a weekend, and instead of basking in all the beauty and amenities all around me, I felt pangs of guilt for leaving my boys. I've been a single mom for years now, and this was the first time I was away from them for even a couple of days. My mom was watching them and kept reassuring me everything was fine, and I know it was! But I still couldn't entirely shake the guilt. As I said, it's all still a work in progress, even now. I don't have it 100% down, but that's why I want to share it with you, so that we can all be on this journey of self-discovery and self-realization together.

Ultimately, you must reward yourself for your efforts, and you need to find ways to treat yourself better and compassionately on a daily basis—not a yearly basis, not a monthly basis, not even a weekly basis. Those are great too, of course, but it all starts with finding a way to value yourself every single day. You *are* worth it, and the only one holding you back from honoring that worth is you.

What Truly Brings You Joy

We honor ourselves by carving out time in our days to find those moments of joy, whether that's sitting down with a cup of tea, reading a few pages of our favorite book, starting a new DIY project, practicing a martial art, kicking the soccer ball around with your kids, going on a walk with a girlfriend, having a square of dark chocolate, whatever it is that *you* truly enjoy. As you can see, a treat doesn't have to be expensive or extravagant. It's simply a way to give ourselves joy each and every day, an embrace of ourselves, which is a way of reinforcing our own worth, our own value—for our own sake, not anyone else's.

I've found that even movement has become a treat for me. For so many years of my life, I made movement a source of labor, always calculated and dedicated to perfecting something—a dance, losing weight, building muscle, punishing myself for having an extra glass of wine or eating too many carbs at lunch. But I've been able to let go of that mindset. Movement isn't a punishment anymore. It's a treat. It makes me feel good. When I'm jogging or doing yoga or going for a walk with a friend, it's because those activities bring me joy. I've transformed movement from a punishment into a reward for myself.

The same thing with food. I no longer look at cookies as the devil. I don't avoid a slice of crusty French bread with butter at all costs. I'm able to enjoy all types of food now. Even the simplest of foods have become a treat for me because I've learned to value myself in ways I was never able to before.

Ultimately, this journey is about giving yourself the space to understand that you possess this beautiful potential inside of

you, and you're allowed to enjoy yourself. You're allowed to enjoy your life. You're allowed to relax and to soak it all in.

This was the epiphany I had with Savasana. I suddenly realized, yes, this is all I really need: this permission to be. To just be. To just rest. To just enjoy this moment and reap the benefits of the practice. And this is a distinct difference between searching for treats outside of ourselves rather than within us. Often, in the search for pleasure outside of ourselves, we're using the treats to numb ourselves, which takes us further away from ourselves, as opposed to using our treats to bring us closer to ourselves. Finding treats that bring us closer to ourselves is what brings true joy. That's when you realize everything is already there. You don't need to add anything more.

I hope by now you understand that there's no one-size-fits-all treat. My treats will be different from your treats, which will be different from your girlfriends' treats. That's the beauty of it. With treats, there's no need to conform, to look outside of ourselves to see what other people are doing. The focus should be all about you—what you enjoy, what brings you pleasure, what brings you peace, and helps you feel whole and valued. The possibilities are of course endless, but I've brainstormed some ideas below just to get your thoughts flowing.

The outdoors is a great place to start, treating yourself to activities in nature that you might always say you don't have time for. Try hiking a quiet nature trail in the spring, for example, or when the leaves start to turn in the first blush of autumn. Or take a leisurely stroll through a nearby park or maybe just around your neighborhood with a close friend. Enjoy the summer breeze in your yard as the sun begins to set, or open a window and take a deep

breath of fresh air as the sun begins to rise. Or maybe you like biking, jogging, playing basketball or soccer, golfing, hiking, swimming, stand-up paddling, gardening, swinging on the monkey bars, or reading a good book on the beach (or anywhere!). Anything and everything that can bring you closer to nature, to fresh air, to dirt and grass, sun and shade, flowers and trees, can all serve as nourishing treats. The point is to help you become more centered, more present, more mindful of the moments you're in. Getting closer to nature is an excellent way to do that. It helps you see and feel what's important in life, which helps you to understand your importance in life.

Of course, maybe the outdoors isn't your thing. There's plenty to do indoors as well to honor and treat yourself, like a square of your favorite chocolate in the late afternoon, carving out time for a 30-minute nap each day to replenish your energy, or taking time to explore new music—or revisiting songs you don't listen to anymore but once loved. Or dedicate time to knit or sew or cultivate your crafting or artistic side that you tend to put off or ignore. And dancing isn't restricted to clubs and ballrooms; I've personally found my bedroom works just fine. Cooking, baking, working on cars, building furniture, painting, rapping, mixing music, sculpting, martial arts, listening to audiobooks, learning to play the instrument you always loved but were too intimidated to try yourself—any of these make good treats. I've recently started practicing the piano again, and it's brought me so much joy, both the process of playing again and also remembering parts of my childhood that I had long forgotten. It's one of those treats that's helped me reclaim part of myself, bridging my past to my present, and making me feel

more whole. We all have these treats we can give ourselves. We just must allow ourselves the time to find them.

Then there are the more extravagant treats—the weekly, monthly, or yearly treats—that aren't possible to practice daily but are important in their own right (as we'll talk about later), such as treating yourself to one outfit a month that you would ordinarily say is too expensive. (It's not, you're worth it!) Set aside a day for a manicure/pedicure with friends (or by yourself), or try a new restaurant or a new cuisine. Take trips—local or far away, short or long, simple or luxurious—to experience new things, see new things, learn new things. I've found part of the joy of trip-taking is the planning part, which becomes more of a daily treat, taking time to find a new destination and plan out an itinerary. The expectation itself is a treat.

Another treat that can be absolutely amazing is submersing yourself in water. It might sound weird at first, but I find the feeling of my body in water incredibly therapeutic. Sinking into it, I experience an incredible sense of relief, the way it carries the weight of my body, the way it feels against my skin. It could be a warm, sudsy bath in the evening, laps at the gym pool in the morning, a hot tub at a spa, a swim in a lake, a dip in the ocean—it doesn't matter to me. I find water very freeing, and I use it as a treat as much as I can, wherever I am.

This is by no means an exhaustive list, and again what's a treat for me might not be at all a treat for you. But hopefully these suggestions are enough to get you started on your own journey in discovering how best to treat yourself.

The TREATS Process

As I said at the start of this chapter, this is not a self-help book. This is not about creating some formula to happiness in your life. This is not about fixing you, or about punishing or depriving yourself in an effort to make yourself purer or more productive or efficient or wealthy. The TREATS process is the complete opposite of all that. It's about celebrating yourself, rewarding yourself, valuing yourself. It's about reinforcing all that you already are in a positive way, not a negative way. It's about addition, not subtraction. How can you add joy to your life each and every day to honor the amazing and unique person that you already are? That's the essential question. That's what TREATS is all about.

But it most definitely is a process. It takes time to discover your value, to realize just how special you are. Years of being self-critical, of receiving messages in various parts of your life that suggest you're not doing all that you should, or being all that you should, wear us down. It doesn't take long before we start to forget who we are and believe the messages more than we believe ourselves.

Time is a crucial factor in the TREATS process, and that's why it must be a daily practice. You must create joy for yourself each day. It must become part of your daily life—a prioritized part of your daily life—that, over time, will begin to reassert and reinforce your value and your uniqueness. The process works not because you merely think it; it works because you actually begin to live it. There's an ocean of difference between the two.

The more you treat yourself, the more you'll learn to listen to your inner guide, and you'll learn to give yourself permission to experience and experiment with what brings you true joy. Experimentation is part of the process. But it takes time to experiment, right? That's the very nature of experimentation—you try to figure something out by trying different things, putting together different variables, to see what happens. Sometimes it works; sometimes it might not. But in either case you're learning—and, importantly, you're learning more and more about yourself, which is the point.

You might try certain things and decide that no, that really wasn't my favorite treat. And other times you'll think, wow, I never realized how much I loved doing this! Ultimately, you'll start to get to know yourself better and on a deeper, more intimate level so you can figure out what it is that brings you joy.

What will unfold is your journey to self-discovery, to finding parts of yourself that you've been neglecting, or have lost along the way, or maybe didn't know existed at all. You don't have to be concerned with what's right or wrong. Our whole lives have been consumed by what's right versus wrong. Is it right to speak up or should I remain quiet? Are my jeans too tight? How does my hair look? Am I too dressed up? Not dressed up enough? Am I too early? Too late? Did I come across as too harsh, too serious, not serious enough? The questions are endless, maddening even. And so that's exactly what the TREATS journey is trying to allow you to escape from—the constant pressure to be and act in certain way, often for the benefit of everyone else. Treats is not about anyone else. It's about you. Period.

But the process doesn't work as well if you don't do it regularly, so we'll spend a lot of time exploring how to easily make this part of your typical routine. It's so important to find a moment—every day, if possible—to do at least one thing for yourself so that eventually it becomes a habit. Then eventually, over the span of a year, you've given yourself 365 days of incredible treats, things you can recall with fondness. For example, you might be able to look back on a certain day and say, “Oh, that was the day I treated myself to an epic solo ski day in fresh powder,” or “That was the day I took a sculpting class.”

While the daily ritual lays the foundation, it's important to build upon that foundation. That means introducing additional and perhaps bigger treats on a weekly basis, monthly basis, and yearly basis, as I mentioned earlier. For example, there are treats that are fun, that can bring you joy, but that you simply can't do every day, or maybe even every week. You know your schedule better than anyone else, and so the pacing of your treats is—as with everything else in this process—entirely up to you. A monthly treat for me is going to the movies with my three boys. Every month, we decide on one movie we're going to go see in the theater. We all look forward to the whole experience: the darkened theater filled with light and sound, the tubs of popcorn and candy, the cozy seats, just sharing those few hours each month together. The joy of that one monthly treat has actually spread beyond that moment. As I was saying earlier with trip-taking, the expectation of experiencing that movie at the end of every month has become a treat in itself. Having that dedicated time with my boys truly brings me joy. And that's what it's all about.

So daily treats are, yes, essential. But so are building in weekly, monthly, and yearly treats. Too often, as we get older and carry all these responsibilities of working, checking in on our parents, taking care of our kids, and so on, we deprioritize our friendships. A monthly treat could be to make sure there's a lunch date in the book to see your friends, or one night to meet for a glass of wine. Or maybe a yearly treat is to prioritize one girls' weekend getaway—or maybe it's a twice-a-year thing. Again, there are no set rules. No one-size-fits-all treat. You need to reflect on the things that bring you joy in your life and work from there to ensure you are stitching them into the fabric of your life.

The Treats Cascading Effect

Here's one of the most wonderful effects of the TREATS process: When you treat yourself well every day, when you value yourself and are kind to yourself, you then serve as a model for all those around you to be and act in the same way. You ignite this wonderful multidirectional, cascading effect of kindness, compassion, and respect.

In taking time to treat yourself in various ways on a daily basis, a weekly basis, and beyond, you will begin to lead a more positive, joyful life. You will feel nourished. You will feel more whole and fulfilled. Because you are nourishing yourself, you are filling yourself with all the things you need to feel joy, to feel whole and fulfilled. The process is self-sustaining and self-reinforcing.

Over time, the process helps you transform your perceived negatives into positives. We tend to forget this, but positivity is a

choice, and it's also a practice. We can make a conscious effort to be positive, to stay positive, to retrain our brain to see the half-filled side of the glass. We can do this even in the way we talk about everyday things to help reframe our attitudes and approach to life. For example, I used to be an “I have to. . .” person, by which I mean that I would go about my days saying to myself, “I have to go to the bank, I have to pick the kids up from school, I have to do the dishes. . .” But that makes everything sound like a chore, like unwanted work, when in actuality I've learned to appreciate these smaller everyday tasks. Now I say, “I get to go to the bank, I get to pick my kids up from school, I get to do the dishes. . .” Why? Because in reframing my mindset, I can see that I'm fortunate to have money in a bank, I'm so lucky to have time to spend with my boys. I can be more mindful and present in all the moments and aspects of my day now.

By taking these proactive, reinforcing steps each day, another amazing thing happens: You model for everyone around you how you deserve to be treated. It's human nature to follow, or at least be influenced by, the models in your life. All relationships work two ways. So if you don't value yourself, if you are constantly putting yourself down or apologizing for things you have no reason to apologize for—simple things, basic things—or always deprioritizing your wants and needs in favor of what other people want, then you're kind of creating a model for others to see and act toward you in the same way to some degree. If you don't value and respect yourself, why should anyone else?

And so the very act of taking the time to treat yourself well, to respect and value yourself, shows others that they need to do

the same. It shows them that you are worthy of being prioritized because you are literally modeling this respect for yourself to other people by treating yourself well each and every day. You don't have to say it; you're doing it. That's the most powerful way to set an example and influence the people around you.

At this point in my life, I think about this often in terms of my boys and creating a healthy model for them. Because it doesn't end with just you; this cascading effect ripples beyond how you feel about yourself, and how others then see and treat you. It also creates a model for how those other people will begin to interact with the world around them apart from you. And this is easiest for me to see in terms of my children. I want to model for them how I want them to think about and treat themselves as well. I can't do that effectively, or as effectively as I'd like, if I'm not treating myself with respect first and foremost. My sense of self and my behavior toward myself is going to show them how they should be treating themselves, and how others should be treating them. I'm saying this in relation to my boys, but I think this extends to any relationship in life.

Here's a simple example of how this works. I'm a big believer in meditation, and I'll talk more about this later in the book. But meditating requires carving out some personal time and space in the day. When I first began the TREATS practice, midday meditation was something I wanted to prioritize as one of my daily treats. Life's messy, though. My schedule is not always the same, and things change. That's just the way it is. So sometimes I found that I was in situations where I would have to excuse myself to take the time to do my meditation. At first, I was very self-conscious. It felt like such a dramatic proclamation, and I was kind of embarrassed to do it. But part of my self-discovery

was to understand boundaries—mainly creating and prioritizing boundaries around things that were important to me. And meditating was important to me, so I forced myself to get over it, and do what I wanted—to make sure, in short, that I was treating myself well.

And what's funny is that I found that the more I respected my own boundaries, the more other people did too. It started with me. Now, rather than it being at all weird or strange, everyone just knows that meditating is part of who I am—and they're very respectful of that boundary. That applies to people I work with, my mom, my boys. It's simply not a thing anymore. Which is the ideal—I can just be myself and everyone accepts me for who I am. At the end of the day, I think people respect when they see other people giving themselves treats and treating themselves well. What could be better than that?