

GUTSY

**LEARNING
TO LIVE WITH
BOLD, BRAVE,
AND BOUNDLESS
COURAGE**

NATALIE FRANKE



New York • Nashville

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To Huey and Harlow—be bold, be brave,
be unapologetically you. You are loved.
You are worthy. You are enough

INTRODUCTION

The thought of writing this book terrified me.

I am no novice to fear. I have done a lot of things in my life that scared me—starting a business, bungee jumping off a mountain, moving across the country, getting a tattoo, going through brain surgery, and doing hundreds of my own injections during fertility treatment.

I even did one of those viral dances on TikTok once. It was horrible, mind you, but I did it...much to the amusement of the tiny handful of people who followed me at the time. If you were to look up “cringeworthy” in the dictionary, the definition would no doubt include a small hyperlink to that particular video.

However, writing a book about overcoming the fear of what other people think feels like my most daunting undertaking yet.

There is something about this subject matter that digs at a very deep and vulnerable piece of my heart. It is the very thing I have fought against my entire life. It is the very thing

that years ago kept me stuck for months, unable to create or show up online as my authentic self. It even kept me from pursuing things that brought me joy.

Who the heck am I to write a book on this subject? I haven't conquered this fear so much as learned to live with it. Shouldn't a writer have put the struggle far behind her in the rearview mirror before stepping forward to talk about it?

Shortly after my first book, *Built to Belong*, hit shelves, I had a conversation with an old friend that clarified precisely why I needed to write *Gutsy*. We were grabbing virtual coffee, as one does during a global pandemic, and catching up after many years apart. She was telling me about her job, and we swapped stories about what our lives were like now that we had entered our thirties.

She asked me how it felt to finally publish a book after all those years of dreaming about it...and my response was, "Terrifying."

She laughed a little and then said, "That's the thing about you, though, Nat...You have never let a little fear get in the way. You do it scared."

She was right. That about sums me up. Despite all of my many, many flaws, I am gutsy.

No one, not even the voice of imposter syndrome that rages in my head, can deny that.

I started a photography business at eighteen with zero knowledge of entrepreneurship or how to monetize a passion. I googled my way through it. I made more mistakes than I am

willing to admit. I looked like a fool countless times. However, I just kept picking myself back up and trying again.

I became a living manifestation of the Chumbawamba song: “I get knocked down, but I get up again; you’re never gonna keep me down”—you can yell at me for getting that stuck in your head. I’m sorry. I knew it was a bad idea...I digress.

I went to college, paid my way by photographing weddings on the weekends, and when it came time to graduate—to the shock of many people who assumed I would get a safe corporate job—I set my degree aside and went full-time in my business.

Those around me were not afraid to express their disapproval, concerns, and doubts about my decision. They never saw my business the way that I did.

To them, it was a hobby, perhaps a profitable distraction.

To me, it was when I felt most alive—behind my camera, working on my own terms.

The uncomfortable truth is I had no idea whether I could cut it as a full-time creative. I was terrified that my business would go belly-up. I was afraid that people would snicker and throw “I told you so’s” at me from the widest corners of the internet if it all fell apart. I wasn’t defying general advice with an ironclad, guaranteed plan for success.

I was taking a risk. I knew that, and yet...I did it anyway.

I chose to bet on myself. I threw my heart and soul into my one-person venture, and it grew. It thrived and became far more successful than even I thought possible. I was booked solid for months, with clients that I absolutely adored. I had

the opportunity to travel the world photographing the most important days in their lives. I was living my dream.

Then the depression hit.

Out of nowhere, it rushed in like a tsunami, crashing into every fiber of my being. It was not the first time I had faced it. My battles with mental health stretch back all the way to my fifteenth birthday. However, this time it was different.

I was far more isolated in this particular season of adulthood. I had left behind the built-in community of school and sports to work from home, alone, with only my laptop and dog to keep me company on workdays. Building a business in a culture of cutthroat competition didn't help either. I opened up to friends about it. They empathized with me about the loneliness of entrepreneurship.

Connecting with others who felt the same way was a turning point for me. It was a small glimmer of hope and a moment of mutual understanding that running a business could, and frankly should, be different.

Together, we co-founded a community called the Rising Tide Society that rapidly swept across the world—from one post with the hashtag #communityovercompetition to over seventy-five thousand entrepreneurs gathering in cities every month to share advice and offer support. Pain became purpose, and I discovered a new passion beyond photography—cultivating community.

Over the last seven years, I have continued that work of supporting other creatives and independents. Through good

times and unprecedented ones, I have grown into my role as a mama bear for small business. This journey has given me the opportunity to connect with thousands of people all around the world.

And after countless conversations with business owners in all stages of entrepreneurship, I began to see similarities in the fears that they openly shared with me. Do you know the one thing that holds so many of them back from going after what they want? Do you know the thing that keeps them stuck and second-guessing or burnt-out from hustling for approval and validation?

Do you know why so many of them almost didn't start their business in the first place?

Other people's opinions.

These are the creative risk-takers and entrepreneurial trailblazers, and even they are not immune to this formidable enemy. It has become clear to me that the fear of what other people think destroys far more dreams than failure ever could.

It prevents brilliant ideas from leaving the realm of ideation. It stops hopeful souls from daring to veer from what is expected of them. It keeps dreamers from doing and holds the brightest minds hostage to spend their lives in the shadows.

I would love to do that...but I could never deal with all of the criticism.

I wish I could quit my day job and take my business full-time, but my parents would never approve.

I want to launch a podcast, but someone I know has already done it. Would they think I'm just trying to copy them? Would other people think that?

What if people judge me for doing that? What if I try, fail, and let them down?

The fear of other people thinking negatively of us is the fear behind many of the other fears you know so well. Think about it...

Are you afraid of failing or afraid of what people think of you if you fail? Are you afraid of success, or are you afraid of the judgment and criticism that comes from stepping outside of your comfort zone and into the spotlight? Are you afraid of public speaking, or is it the eyes of an audience and the thoughts they may be thinking of you when you take the stage that scare you? I could keep going, but by now you can see the point.

Even when we push ourselves past the point of hesitation and go after what we want in spite of the fear, we often still find ourselves hustling for validation and approval. We put more value in vanity metrics than we do in genuine indicators of progress.

We become captivated by the fleeting dopamine hits of

likes and comments on social media that remind us that other people approve of what we are doing in the world. We start to share not for ourselves, but for them—measuring our enoughness by double taps and tiny red hearts on tiny incomplete snippets of our lives.

When caring about what others think becomes an obsession, either knowingly or unknowingly, it stifles us. It feeds the monster of insecurity inside. Without even realizing it, we set goals for ourselves based on other people's definitions of success and strive to hit milestones that perhaps were never even meant for us in the first place.

We feel lacking when we believe that people think we don't measure up or when someone disapproves of our decisions. We stay silent to avoid criticism. We forget who we were before the world put its hands on us and the opinions of others molded us into a person we do not recognize. We hide our light to avoid drawing attention. We shrink and shrink and shrink.

If we aren't careful, we can wither away into a gray version of ourselves. Can you remember a moment when you felt that way? Leached of all color and life. Do you feel a little like that now?

If you do, I promise that you are not alone. It does not have to be this way.

Striving for what the world deems worthy means surrendering your soul at the altar of perfectionism. Looking first for external validation means putting your power and

your purpose in the hands of someone else. As long as we are beholden to the opinions of others, we will always risk living lives that were never meant for us.

We cannot allow our fear of what other people may think to keep us from taking action. We also cannot allow endless striving for approval and validation to hold us back from living deeply meaningful and fulfilled lives.

This is not a simple challenge to confront. It is not a quick fix or immediate transformation. It takes intentional effort and oftentimes daunting introspection. Tackling this challenge head-on is going to require all of us to get a little uncomfortable.

Why might that be? Because there will always be some part of us, deep within our being, that is attuned to others' opinions (we will talk about the science of this in chapter 2). It is knit into the very fabric of who we are as members of a social species. This trait is not a flaw but rather a core component of our inherent design. It serves a purpose, although in our modern lives, it serves us far less so than it did our ancestors.

So while we cannot flip a switch and stop caring about what other people think of us, we can transform the way we understand and navigate it. *Gutsy* will show you how.

This book is the kick in the pants you need to stop letting other people's opinions hold you back and start getting gutsy. Whether you are launching out of school and into your first job, you have been climbing the career ladder for decades, you are starting your small business, or you are leaving the corporate world behind to raise your family, *Gutsy* will

challenge you to define success on your own terms, feel confident navigating the world's criticism and expectations, and go after what you truly want in life.

Gutsy will remind you that your journey is for you and you alone. Everyone is entitled to their opinion. However, it is important that you remember that this also applies to you.

How you feel about yourself matters more than how others feel about you or what they think about your life decisions. So often we forget that. So often we let the whispers around us drown out the confidence within us. This is the moment that we unpack why that happens and become the heroes of our own story. This is the moment that we become the boss of our own lives and remember who we truly are.

This book is for the achievers who are tired of chasing after approval, the go-getters who are no longer hustling for validation, the dreamers who are done waiting for their moment to arrive, and the discouraged hearts who need a reminder that they are worthy and have always been capable of greatness.

We can stop the fear of what other people think from keeping us stuck, silent, and struggling to feel worthy. We can work toward self-acceptance, crank up the volume of our inner voice, and allow our core values to lead us forward. We can embrace the inevitability of one day making a fool of ourselves and even the potential of letting other people down. We can rewrite the rule book that we live by and chart a course for our life that is as unique as we are. We can shed

the weight of the world's expectations and love the person we see staring back at us in the mirror.

Gutsy is a book written to empower you to do precisely that—to push past the fear of what other people think, a fear that so often keeps us stuck and stagnant, and to move forward with bold, brave, and boundless courage. This book is your road map to a life brimming with curiosity, confidence, and fulfillment.

This isn't a book about courage written through the rose-colored glasses of toxic positivity and stuffed with empty “pick yourself up by your bootstraps—isms” to leave you feeling uplifted. When it comes to fundamentally changing your life, you have to be willing to do the work. I am not talking about effort that generates applause from the outside world or earns you the adult equivalent of a gold star. It isn't that sort of thing at all.

I am talking about doing the work that leaves you teary-eyed and uncomfortable. It is the type of deep introspection and brutal honesty that makes your palms sweat and your stomach churn. It is reflecting on the lies that you have accepted as truths and the people who fanned the flames of your insecurities by projecting their own.

I have fought hard to build a life for myself on the back of disapproval, criticism, and those who doubted my decisions. I have supported an army of others who have done that too. There is a way forward into the life that you want, and this book was written to help you get there.

Before we dive in, I want to share a few very important disclaimers that you need to know:

Although I am a psychology and neuroscience nerd who studied a good deal of the stuff in undergrad, I am not a mental health professional.

I repeat: I am not a mental health professional.

None of the content contained within this book is a substitute for therapeutic diagnosis or treatment. Always seek the advice of a qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding your mental health.

My area of expertise is in entrepreneurship, community building, and coaching. I have been a small-business owner for well over a decade and for seven years I supported a community of over seventy-five thousand creatives and independents, helping them to push past their fears and grow businesses of their own.

A large part of my understanding of what courage means comes from the lessons I have learned from being a part of this extraordinary community. There is nothing “small” about starting a small business.

My experiences with motherhood and my rocky road to get there during my battle with infertility shape my perspective too. I’ve walked knowingly into my deepest fears, shared those journeys publicly, invited the world in for comment, and it has taught me quite a lot over the years. I am here to share those lessons with all of you.

There are stories shared within the pages of this book on subjects that may be difficult for some readers. I am intentional in my story selection and retelling to minimize

potential triggers, but it is important that I give you the heads-up. These stories are from my own lived experiences and include topics such as depression, anxiety, a benign brain tumor diagnosis, infertility, and undergoing fertility treatment such as in vitro fertilization (IVF).

Just as there are parts of your story that have been unexpected, heavy, or challenging, I have dealt with that too. These lived experiences have shaped the way that I understand courage, and my hope is that you can see parts of your own story reflected throughout the pages of this book.

I am deeply honored that you have chosen to welcome me into your journey of learning not to care what others think. I do not take that decision lightly...So, earnestly, from my heart to yours, thank you.

I promise to keep it real with you in the chapters ahead. My greatest hope is that you leave this book with a fresh perspective on how the opinions of others have influenced your past and that you feel empowered to confront how they are holding you back in your present.

Enough about my story—it is time to dig into your own. Learning to live with bold, brave, and boundless courage does not mean living without fear. It means never allowing that fear to keep you from living your life.

Together, let's uncover what this looks like for you. One page at a time.

GUTSY

GUTSY

CHAPTER 1

GETTING GUTSY

I feel morally obligated to open this book with a disclaimer. A big, bold warning from a place of love that reads, *Good gracious, things are about to get real.*

Why am I telling you this? Well, I don't want you taking a big sip of what you think is sparkling water only to discover that it is a spunky gin and tonic, you know?

That happened to me once and it caught me completely off guard.

When it comes to this book, we need to be on the same page. You are about to be launched out of your comfort zone faster than my toddler into the toy section of Target as soon

as we walk into the store. I am talking zero to sixty in under a second.

Think of this as a literary two-week notice—a declaration that you are done letting the opinions of others boss you around. You are ready to quit caring about the things that don't matter and fight for the things that do.

This book is a rallying cry for the ones who are tired of chasing after approval, hustling for validation, and bending over backward to meet everyone's expectations. It is a guidebook for those growing into their greatness—for the weary souls who are once again ready to be honest with themselves, take meaningful action in their lives, and carve out an authentic path forward into the future.

This book is more like a spicy habanero than a sweet bell pepper. It is zesty. It is fresh as heck. It is bound to make you sweat just a little. It will propel you forward like three extra shots of espresso on a Monday morning...which, as a caffeine connoisseur, I can personally attest will dust off the cobwebs in your mind and get your brain buzzing.

It may, in all fairness, also make you a bit emotional and introspective. There is truth in tears, and I have cried my fair share over the past three decades I have been on this earth. I am willing to bet that you have too. Part of unpacking the meaning of courage and facing down your fears over what other people think is being radically honest with yourself.

Here is what I need you to know right out of the gate:

Getting Gutsy

1. Your definition of getting gutsy is unique to you and you alone.
2. Bravery doesn't always look the way that you would expect it to.
3. Courage isn't a competition. Comparison in this context is only a distraction.
4. How you feel about yourself matters more than how others feel about you.
5. You deserve to live a life beyond the limitations of other people's opinions.

Worrying about what other people think leads us to look externally for proof of whether we are on the right track or whether we are “good enough”—being gutsy means throwing all of the “shoulds” out the window and embracing your unique definition of success in order to find true fulfillment in life. There is no standard measurement of bravery. There is no single path to overcoming the fear of what other people think of you.

Don't be surprised when getting gutsy doesn't look anything like you expected. It rarely does.

For some, it means looking in the mirror and seeing the younger you within; it means speaking compassionately and honestly to that smaller self. Sometimes it even requires us to become the nurturer that we were hoping would protect our heart countless times in our past. Often it means that we must become the author of our own story—that we take the pen

back from the commentators influencing our decisions from the sidelines and begin to write our future chapters ourselves.

In order to spring you from the quicksand of other people's opinions and launch you forward into freedom, we have to get *really* honest.

I am talking the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth...so help me God! So, let's consider this first chapter as your official swearing-in ceremony.

This is an oath that you are making to yourself—a promise to be the undiluted, unapologetically earnest, and deeply vulnerable version of you. This is your moment to set aside all expectations of who you should be and commit to revealing the remarkable human being that you truly are.

And friend, that oath goes both ways. I am promising to show up as my truest self too. There is no holding back, no gate-keeping, and no pretending that I have it all figured out. In the realm of self-help, it feels forbidden to admit that last part, but it is the most honest place to begin. I am a student of life, and this is a thesis after many years of grueling education.

Do I have it all figured out? Heck no.

Do I feel like I have an immense amount to share on the subject? That would be a giant yes.

I went from small-town photographer to the leader of a massive grassroots community of independent business owners in the span of a few months. With more eyes came more criticism, and my worry over the opinions of others spiraled. It kept me from wanting to show up as my authentic self. It

made me second-guess every tiny decision. It nearly robbed me of the joy I felt in serving my community.

Perhaps *Gutsy* is more like a cookbook than an educational thesis in the sense that every day for the past three decades, I have been in the kitchen of life mixing up something new, testing it out, and learning along the way. Sometimes I got it right. Sometimes I didn't. The good news is that, at this point, I don't fear setting off the smoke alarm any longer. I just look at it as feedback and keep pressing on.

This is not a space where we hide our hardship or dismiss our struggle. This is the place where you are invited to the table precisely as you are. Your story is valid—past, present, and future.

For the next several chapters, there is no need to put on a show. In this space, you get to be the real you and throw all polished pretenses out the window. Here, we welcome messy attempts, embarrassing outcomes, and epic fails. You aimed for the goal and you missed...So what? There is no shame in showing up and giving it your best shot. Whether a glorious victory or a mortifying mistake—I believe you are more likely to regret what could have been, than you are to regret failing in the pursuit of your wildest dreams.

Here, we show up, we step up, and we surrender our insecurities. I am talking about rolling up to the party with spit-up on your shirt and dog poop on your shoes (*which I have once done quite literally*) without worrying about a thing.

You hoped you would be further along by now? You are

not alone. Here, it is okay to grieve where you had hoped to be while creating space for new beginnings. Here, we honor the journey, the hardships you have endured, and the hopes you have yet to see fulfilled. From this moment on, you can stop sprinting to keep up with someone else's timeline and step forward purposefully, in confidence, onto the path paved uniquely for you.

We aren't competing against anyone here. There is nothing to measure up to, no milestones you have to prove you have achieved. You can take the world's expectations, drop them in the nearest garbage bin, and holler for me to take it out to the curb.

Here, we don't have to hide who we are or who we desire to become. You can reveal the most authentic version of yourself—messy, imperfect, and earnest. Here, there is no such thing as being too much or too little. Here, you are always enough.

Remember: no one ever changed the world by dimming their light, shrinking back, or avoiding criticism. Sure, it is safer to stay put, stay quiet, and stay stuck...but there is no gold medal for never getting started. Consider this your moment to uncover the audacious courage within yourself and make an impact on this world that only you can make.

I am your book big sister who wants to see you win... which means that I am going to tell it like it is. I am going to call you on your crap. I am going to push you to the edge of your comfort zone...and I am doing all of it because you deserve to know just how incredible you are.

I believe that you deserve so much more than a life of striving for the approval of others. You deserve to feel confident in yourself. You deserve to be empowered to use your voice. I want you to show up as your bravest self. I want you to turn every page with radical curiosity, audacious courage, and abundant grace.

The Future Is Yours to Define

It wasn't until I turned thirty that I realized it was okay to suck at something. Yes, I genuinely mean that. I realize that sounds a bit ridiculous, but it is the truth.

If you can't take the heat, then get out of the kitchen... right?

But what if baking brings you joy even if you burn everything that you put into the oven? Is it only worth your time if you excel at it? Are your joy, your curiosity, your passion not reasons enough to do something?

I spent the majority of my life believing that if I wasn't good or it didn't earn the validation of others, then I shouldn't do it. I never fully understood just how trapped I had become by wanting to please the world and earn some imaginary stamp of approval.

There is a good chance you are knowingly or unknowingly battling limiting beliefs precisely like this one. There are years of conditioning that have shaped your decisions and your perspective of what it means for you to live your best life.

Think about it...

Who defined what your best life is, anyway? Up until this point, have you ever stopped to think about why you envision success in the way that you do? Who painted that picture? Is it your original creation or was it slowly sculpted by the opinions of others and the expectations placed upon you from the moment that you were born?

If you have never tugged on the thread that weaves together your success equation, I am willing to bet that many of the things you think you should be and should have will unravel. What you do, where you live, who you call friends, how you spend your money and your time—all of it when examined through this lens gains new clarity.

Are you in the race because you love running or are you chasing after the applause and the fleeting feeling of validation you get as you edge closer to the finish line? Perhaps you are running because it is all you have ever known. Perhaps you never even questioned if running was optional in the first place.

The world won't fall apart if you slow your pace, stop entirely, step off the paved path, or move toward an entirely new destination. If you don't like the finish line that you are running toward, you have the power to change it.

It took me so many years of striving for the impossibility of perfection and simultaneously shrinking into the mold of who I should be in order to realize that it didn't have to be this way. And once I did...once the pressures and expectations unraveled, it required me to truly get gutsy.

Being authentically yourself is not easy. Going against the grain, speaking your mind, doing things differently, letting go of a path no longer meant for you—it all requires guts. It takes bold, brave, and boundless courage in order to move forward with confidence into the person you were always meant to be.

The moment you realize that caring about what other people think has kept you chasing after a life that was never meant for you, you have to get gutsy in order to move forward.

So, what does it truly mean to be “gutsy,” anyway?

Gutsy (adjective):

marked by courage, pluck, or determination

*Synonyms include “adventurous,” “audacious,” “bold,” and “daring”*¹

I love a good dictionary definition; however, these definitions often have their limitations. I would be remiss if I didn’t address one key consideration when it comes to defining what this term means to you.

Are you ready?

Here it is: there is no single definition of courage. No one else can tell you what your version of being gutsy looks like—not me, not your partner, not your best friend, and certainly not the honorable *Merriam-Webster*.

There is no one walking this planet today who sees the

1. *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. “gutsy (*adj.*),” accessed July 16, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gutsy>.

desires of your heart, the trials of your past, and the potential of your future like you do. Defining how this word manifests in your life is for you and you alone. It is a personal quest and an intimate journey.

Being gutsy sometimes means having the courage to start over, try something new, let people down, take risks, make mistakes, fail epically, look like a fool, be judged by the world, be misunderstood, apologize, lean on others, be vulnerable, and even be rebellious at times.

The more clarity you gain on what this type of plucky bravery means to you, the sooner you are able to set new goals in alignment with this mindset shift.

Your gutsy goals for the future might look different from the goals of every other person reading this book, and that's okay. I also believe that if your vision of the bold and brave version of yourself makes you a little nervous, then it is likely a very good sign. You are on the right track.

Gutsy goals may look like standing up for yourself, asking for a raise, ending a relationship, running for political office, or starting a small business. It could also mean finally getting a therapist, starting a blog, moving out on your own, launching a podcast, attending a networking event, or being more vulnerable on social media. There are an infinite number of ways to incorporate a little more courage into your daily life...and it will likely look different for every person reading this book.

Also, let me be downright blunt in this next assertion—

there is no need to read between the lines here. If the only gutsy goal you make is to look in the mirror and be honest with yourself, that is far more than many people can say they have accomplished in their lifetimes.

Step up to the mirror and see yourself with new eyes. Self-acceptance is a courageous act. Acknowledging who you are and what you earnestly want from your life is no small feat. This level of personal vulnerability requires bold and boundless courage for most of us. Here, we honor that.

I stand by my belief that no one else can define what it means for you to be courageous.

Think about it. If I asked a roomful of people to line up in order of who is the most gutsy to who is the least, how would they make that determination? Is a person's boldness or courage quantifiable or even comparable?

I'd argue that it is an impossible task.

The courage it takes for one person to bungee jump off a mountain may be the same amount that it takes another person to get out of bed in the morning—and I don't mean that hyperbolically. There are some of you reading this that know precisely the amount of courage it takes to rise from the depths of depression or keep going in the face of cataclysmic anxiety.

It takes guts. The world may value external indicators of audacious courage more than internal ones, but the latter are no less significant. The way things appear isn't always a true reflection of the way things are. Perhaps the inner work is the hardest work we will ever do. I know firsthand because

I have experienced all of the aforementioned scenarios. The depression, the anxiety—yes, even the bungee jumping.

Each of us walks a different road under different circumstances. What comes naturally to you might require intentional preparation and heaps of bravery for someone else. Something you have never had to overcome might be the very thing holding another person back.

Getting gutsy can look like saying yes or saying no. It can mean holding on or letting go.

We are most familiar with courage when it looks like going after what you want, speaking your mind, or taking bold risks...However, bravery can also look like being honest with yourself, asking for help, or taking a step back from a dream no longer meant for you.

You don't need to bare your soul to the world in order to be brave. You don't even need to take external action at all. You simply need to honor who you truly are in the comfort of your own heart. That's where the action matters most.

Most of the time, the bravest decision—the choice that requires the most courage—is the same one that the world might not understand, let alone applaud.

We also have to remember that looking to others as a benchmark for bravery is the very thing that we are trying to get away from. This is precisely why the line-up analogy is so important and so purposefully uncomfortable.

On your personal quest for courage, you are not being measured against anyone else. Their battles may not be your

battles. Their strengths may not be your strengths. Their dreams, desires, and purpose look entirely different as well.

Other people are not your competition, nor are they your enemy.

The only person you are competing against is the version of you who cared more about being liked by others than about being your authentic self...the version of you who shrunk yourself down or dressed yourself up to be more pleasing and acceptable for the world.

There is only one thing that is more terrifying than being who you truly are and that is abandoning your authenticity and retreating into the person that the world expects you to be.

Is that a risk you are willing to take? To spend your life being a fraction of the person that you truly are? To surrender your uniqueness, your potential, your purpose at the altar of other people's approval?

Are you willing to get to the end of your life and join the countless others whose biggest regret at the very end of it all was "I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me"? Bronnie Ware, an Australian nurse working in palliative care, says that it is the unfulfilled dreams that were lost at the expense of others' expectations that is the most common regret of the dying.¹

Are you willing to settle for that?

To join all those who, in their final moments when it is

1. Bronnie Ware, *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying: A Life Transformed by the Dearly Departing* (: Hay House Inc., 2019).

already too late and their time is up, realize that they never went after what they truly wanted? They are held captive by the knowledge that if they had been courageous enough to truly be themselves, they could have lived a very different life. Do you want that to be your biggest regret too?

No way, friend...That is not going to be your story.

You deserve so much more than that. You deserve to look back with pride at everything you have overcome and every moment you chose to be brave in the face of what scared you.

You deserve to celebrate your successes and failures, to see your fingerprints on all that is good in the lives of those you touch...the ones who felt empowered to be themselves and pursue their own dreams because you had the courage to chase after yours...the ones who felt belonging for the very first time when you held out your hand.

You deserve to see this world made better by your voice, your gifts, your lived experiences honored by those who felt seen through your eyes. You deserve all of that and so much more.

Remember that your definition of what it means to be gutsy is unique to you and you alone. No one else can hand you the blueprint to your most courageous life, and because of that, comparison only serves as a distraction. Courage is not a competition. The way you live a gutsy life is going to look different from everyone else, and that is a beautiful thing.

Each chapter ahead is crafted to help you get over the most common manifestations of this fundamental fear. From navigating criticism to failing publicly, we're going to address the

very things that often keep us up at night. With a heap of storytelling, a dash of science, and a sprinkle of reflective questions and prescriptive advice, we are going to walk through this together and emerge confidently on the other side.

In order for this book to truly shape you, we need to be partners in your progress. This requires you to do the work and ask yourself the hard questions. Questions that perhaps you have never been asked or never felt ready to answer.

True transformation can't be demanded of us. Our free will grants us the ability to stay stuck as much as it does to find freedom. That being said, when we do decide to commit to digging into the softest, most vulnerable pieces of ourselves and unreservedly embracing them, a new chapter of our life begins.

I am going to ask you a lot of guiding questions in the pages ahead. Only you can be the one to answer them. My biggest challenge to you is that you make the time to do it.

Here are some gutsy guiding questions to push this conversation forward:

- Why do you believe that the opinions of others matter so much to you?
- Who in your past may have made love and connection seem conditional, something you needed to earn, fight for, or that perhaps you didn't deserve?
- Who would you be if you hadn't spent years of your life trying to achieve the approval of others?

- When do you first remember worrying about what other people think of you?
- Where do you feel safest? Where can you truly be you?
- Where is it that you feel stuck? What decisions have you been putting off or where has fear been holding you back from taking action?
- How do you desire to feel in the future? What do you imagine the experience of success to be like to you?

Grab a journal, turn on some tear-jerking tunes or calming white noise if you need help focusing like I do, and get to answering these questions before continuing forward.

There is so much transformational goodness awaiting you in the pages ahead. Are you ready to get gutsy? Are you ready to stop living for approval and endlessly striving for validation and start charging forward with clarity and confidence?

I sure hope so. I really do. Let's turn the page into the next chapter...and what I hope is a new beginning in your life. Let's get gutsy.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Natalie Franke is an author, community builder, neuroscience nerd, and mama bear for small business. As one of the founders of the Rising Tide and the chief evangelist at HoneyBook, she supports over a hundred thousand independent business owners while fostering a spirit of community over competition around the world.

Natalie currently lives in Annapolis, Maryland, with her husband and two children. She's into doodling, drinking more caffeine than is appropriate, and giving bear hugs.