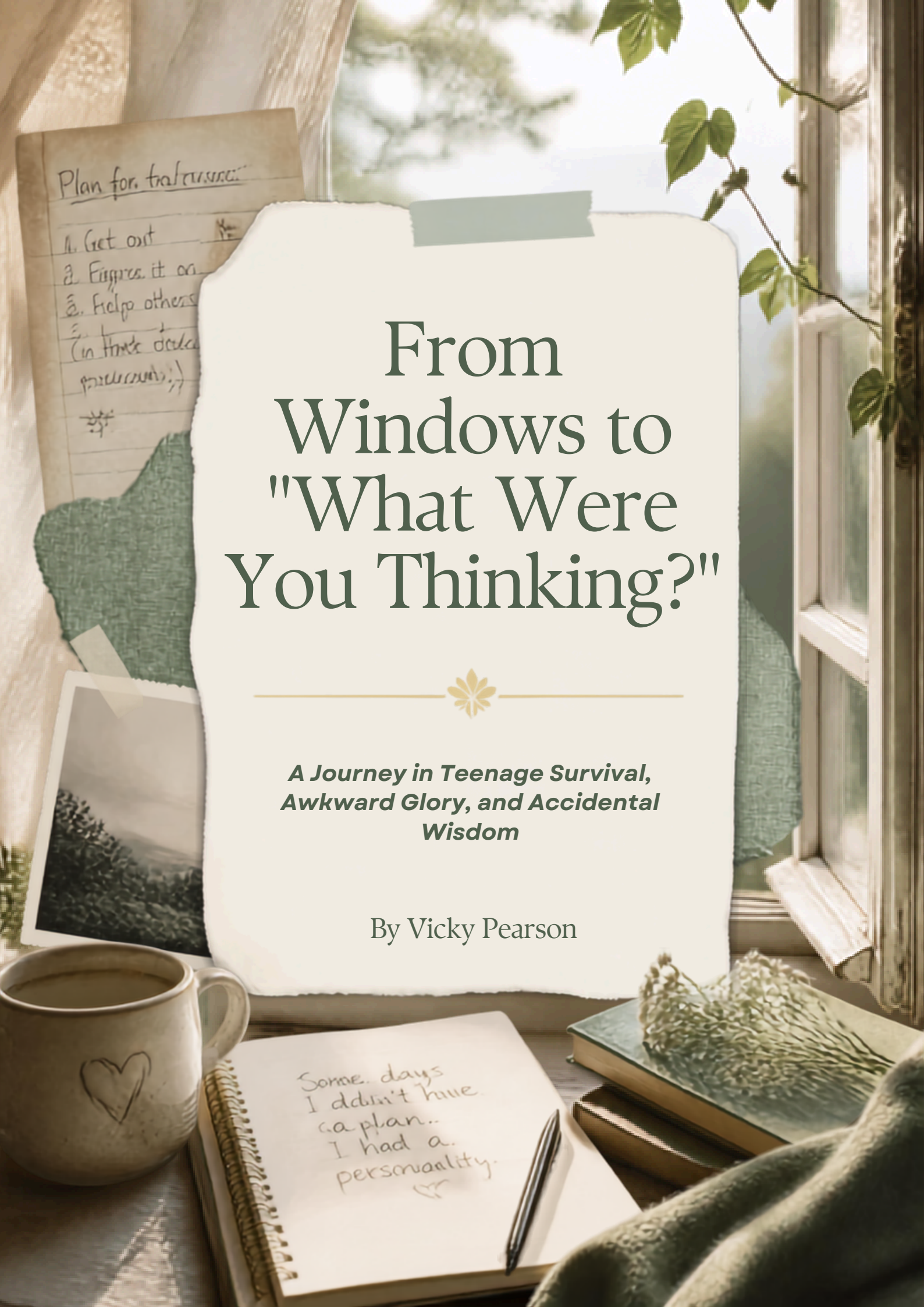



# From Windows to "What Were You Thinking?"

***A Journey in Teenage Survival, Awkward Glory, and Accidental Wisdom***

By Vicky Pearson

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# From Windows to “What Were You Thinking?”

A Journey in Teenage Survival, Awkward Glory, and Accidental Wisdom



# Introduction

## A note before you begin

If you've picked up this journal, chances are you've lived through a childhood, a teenagerhood, or a general life experience that made absolutely no sense at the time, and only slightly more sense now.

Welcome. You're in good company.

This isn't a self-help manual.
It's not a "fix yourself in five steps" guide.
It's not even a tidy memoir.

It's a collection of stories, misadventures, and reflections from someone who spent her teenage years ricocheting between chaos, comedy, and the occasional fire-extinguisher incident... and somehow came out the other side with humour intact and resilience quietly stitched into her bones.

You'll find two things here: *the story*, and the space *to make sense of your own story.*

One is messy, funny, and occasionally ridiculous.
The other is gentle, grounding, and entirely yours.



You can skip around… but honestly, it makes far more sense if you don't.

Teenage chaos is best experienced chronologically. Trust me.

This journal is designed to guide you, softly, steadily, from the mishaps and mayhem to the hindsight and healing.

Take it at your own pace.

Pause where you need to. Laugh where you need to. And let the reflections meet you exactly where you are.

My hope is simple: that somewhere between the awkward glory, the unexpected wisdom, and the quiet construction of resilience, you'll recognise pieces of yourself, the brave parts, the tired parts, the funny parts, the parts that kept going even when nothing made sense.

Take a breath.
Settle in.

And let this be a place where you return to yourself, gently and without judgement.

Now… shall we begin?

Chapter 1

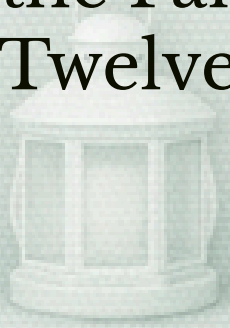
Growing Up Loud:
Childhood Chaos & the First Quiet Heartbreak

Chapter 2

Moving Schools & Constant Reinvention

Chapter 3

Working in the Family Shop at Twelve



## Chapter 1

# Growing Up Loud: Childhood Chaos & the First Quiet Heartbreak

### Mini-Theme:

*Childhood friendships, identity, and early self-awareness*

If there'd been a gold medal for talking in primary school, I'd have won it every year. My mum swears she considered buying stock in earplugs.

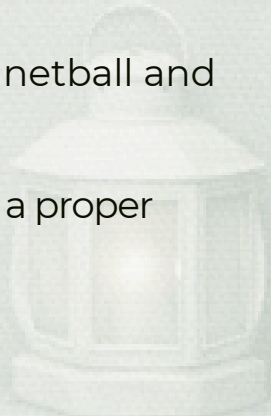
At school, I was the human equivalent of surround sound: chatty, animated, and utterly unstoppable.

At home, I dialled it down a notch: more background radio than headline act, but I still managed to give my poor mum plenty of reasons to wish for noise-cancelling headphones (long before their time).

I completed primary school without any trauma or drama, unless you count one fight with Wanda in the playground. Wanda, my playground rival and occasional best friend, had a knack for saying just the wrong thing.

I didn't like something she said, so I dropped the netball and went for her.

To be fair, we ended up just pulling each other's hair, a proper playground catfight, minus the fur.



But Wanda was more than a sparring partner. She lived five doors down from me, and our siblings played together like a small, chaotic tribe.

We explored our housing estate, walked to and from school, and shared the kind of childhood friendship that feels stitched into your bones.

Wanda wasn't just someone I played with after school. She was part of the furniture of my childhood. If Mum wanted to know where I was, Wanda's house was one of the first places she'd look. If Wanda wasn't at ours, I was probably at hers. We argued, made up, argued again, and carried on as though nothing had happened.

She was the first and only true best friend I ever had. I didn’t know it then, but losing her daily presence would be the first quiet heartbreak of my young life.

My last year at Meadowbrook County Primary School was also when I spent a lot of time sitting at the front of the class, where Mr Peacock could keep an eye on me during lessons.

By then, I was already known as the chatty one, the lively one, the one who needed watching.

Looking back, it's strange how early we start collecting labels about who we are.

Loud.
Talkative.
Too much.

What I didn't realise then was that I was also about to become the girl who had to say goodbye to her first best friend.

Childhood has a funny way of changing the script when you're not paying attention.

## Chapter 2

# Moving Schools & Constant Reinvention

### Mini-Theme:

*Change, loss, and identity in motion*

Heading to high school felt strange, especially knowing Wanda wouldn’t be there with me.

She was off to Westbrook High, while I was off to Ashfield High, the local secondary school in Brookdale, a typical Manchester-area comprehensive with long corridors, echoing stairwells, and that unmistakable smell of wet coats and teenage panic.

Being in high school meant seeing less of her, even outside school, and within a few months, we’d moved away. It was the end of an era of questionable hairstyles, accidental sibling shouting, and netball crimes.

Leaving Brookdale at twelve felt like someone had cancelled my favourite TV show mid-season, unresolved storylines and all.

Brookdale wasn't exciting. It wasn't famous. It was just home. It was the only place I'd ever known. We roamed the estate like it belonged to us, cutting through shortcuts, calling for each other across gardens, and disappearing for hours without anybody thinking much of it.

Childhood felt permanent.

Then one day it wasn't.

At twelve, I didn't get a vote on where we lived. The decision had already been made. All I could do was watch my familiar world get packed into boxes.

We'd promised to keep seeing each other, the way twelve-year-olds do when they can't imagine a friendship ending. Neither of us understood yet that sometimes people don't leave your life all at once.

Sometimes they just appear less and less until one day they're part of your story rather than your everyday life.

## Chapter 3

# Working in the Family Shop at Twelve

### Mini-Theme:

*Early responsibility, innocence, and growing up too soon*

Before I even set foot in Oakridge High, there was a strange little pause in my education.

When we moved, Mum and Dad had secured a fruit-and-veg shop that also sold fish, and while I waited for a school place to open up, I didn’t attend school for nearly three months.

Instead, at the tender age of twelve, I worked in the shop serving customers like a tiny, underpaid market trader.

While other kids were doing maths worksheets, I was weighing potatoes, wrapping haddock, and handing out change with the confidence of someone twenty years older.

It didn’t feel unusual at the time.

Nothing in my life ever did. Looking back, though, it explains a lot about why responsibility never frightened me.

I'd already been living like a miniature adult long before anyone thought to question it.



# Chapter One: Reflections

**Mini-Theme:**
*Childhood friendships, identity, and early self-awareness*

Who was the “Wanda” of your childhood? The person who felt like home, even in chaos?

What parts of your younger self still live in you now — the loudness, the softness, the humour?

When you think about your childhood self, what do you wish she’d known about her worth and her place in the world?

How did the adults around you respond to your personality, and how has that shaped the way you express yourself now?

# Chapter Two: Reflections

**Mini-Theme:**
*Change, loss, and identity in motion*

When in your life were you asked to start over before you felt ready?

What friendships or connections did you lose along the way, and how did those losses shape you?

How did instability or sudden change shape your sense of identity growing up?

What would you tell your twelve-year-old self about endings that arrive too soon?

# Chapter Three: Reflections

**Mini-Theme:**
*Early responsibility, innocence, and growing up too soon*

When were you first expected to act older than your age, and how did it shape you?

What responsibilities were placed on you before you understood their weight?

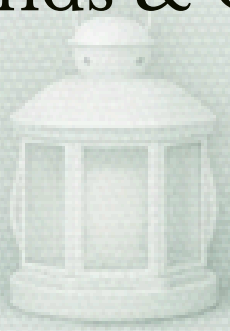
How did early work, chores, or family expectations influence your confidence or independence?

What did you learn about people by watching or serving them at a young age?

Chapter 4
The Window, the Lunch Hall & Mission Impossible

Chapter 5
The Woven Lunchbox Picnic

Chapter 6
Out of Bounds & Out of Luck



## Chapter 4

# The Window, the Lunch Hall & Mission Impossible

**Mini-Theme:**
*Belonging, boldness, and the sting of silence*

Fast-forward to the next chapter: new town, new school, new set of antics.

Oakridge High School was a typical comprehensive school. The buildings looked tired, the teachers permanently puzzled, and the students supplied enough drama to keep everyone busy.

Around the same time, my parents, who treated moving house like a competitive sport, whisked us off to Trenton.

Which is how I found myself spending a brief, and let's call it eventful, period at Oakridge High School.

***Spoiler***: I wasn't about to blend into the wallpaper.

I joined Oakridge High School halfway through my second year of high school, and you know how people say kids can be cruel? My arrival was less "new girl" and more "confetti bomb at a librarian's convention."

I was bubbly, chatty and, if we're being honest, a bit of a human firecracker.

New place. New rules.

What did it bring out in me?

My introduction? Oh, nothing major.

Just jumping out of a classroom window and sauntering to the changing rooms like I was starring in *Mission Impossible: Social Acceptance*.

Launching myself through a classroom window turned out to be surprisingly straightforward.

Working out where I fitted in was considerably harder.

The next day, I walked into the dinner hall, tray in hand, half expecting at least a ripple of applause.

Instead, I got silence.
Not angry silence.
Not even awkward silence.

Just the kind that makes you suddenly wonder whether everyone knows something you don't.

I sat down and tried to break it.
"Hey, has anyone seen Emma?"
Nothing.
"Did I spill gravy on my shirt or something?"
Still nothing.

One by one, my new “friends” discovered a sudden fascination with the backs of their own heads. Even the dinner ladies seemed to avoid eye contact.

By the end of lunch, I’d circled the school twice and not one person would even throw me a sympathetic nod.

The message was clear: I was the social equivalent of leftover cabbage

## Chapter 5

# The Woven Lunchbox Picnic

### Mini-Theme:

*Solitude, self-trust, and quiet resilience*

If the entrance was loud, the silence was louder.

So, what do you do when you've been promoted to a one-person social leper colony? You grab your woven lunchbox, peak 1980s chic, by the way, and head for the fields.

There I was, cross-legged by the woods, unwrapping sandwiches like I'd invented outdoor dining with a view.

Long before Instagram made it cool, I was staging my own rustic picnic, complete with grass stains, damp earth, the occasional wasp, and sandwiches that somehow tasted better outdoors.

At first, it stung. The silence. The empty seat beside me. The nagging feeling that perhaps launching myself out of a classroom window hadn't been the icebreaker I'd imagined.

But after a while, something unexpected happened.

**I started enjoying it.**

No awkward conversations. No wondering where to sit. No worrying about whether people liked me.

Just me, my lunch, and whatever wildlife decided to join me that day.

Weeks passed. My fizzing energy simmered down to “mildly hyperactive,” and, just like that, people started talking to me again.

Apparently, all it took to win them over was not vaulting out of any more windows.

I didn't realise it then, but those lunches in the fields taught me something useful.

Learning to sit alone without shrinking was the start of something important.

## Chapter 6

# Out of Bounds & Out of Luck

**Mini-Theme:**
*Boundaries, Fear, and the Things We Normalised Too Young*

Of course, what's a school experience without a few questionable adventures? One day, a group of us, in classic rule-breaking fashion, ventured into the out-of-bounds woods.

There, like a character from a very inappropriate pantomime, stood a young man behind a tree who decided it was the perfect moment for some unsolicited exposure.

We screamed and bolted like we were auditioning for the Olympic sprints. Nobody was catching us that day.

But the saga had actually started earlier. My first flasher encounter was at Ashfield High. Picture it: lunchtime, a game of hide and seek that turned into Where the heck did everyone go?

I trekked up a lonely, wooded path, only to be greeted by a man who clearly misunderstood the concept of hide and seek.

At eleven years old, that was enough to turn me into a mime artist mid-scream, mouth wide open, legs pumping, but not a sound coming out.

I didn't really know what I'd seen. I just knew it had scared me.

Eventually, I stumbled across an elderly gentleman on a bench and tried to explain what had happened.

He listened, nodded, and sent me off to tell the headmaster.

The headmaster, in typical 1980s fashion, did absolutely nothing.

At least, nothing that I ever saw.

At the time, I brushed it off as another bizarre moment in a bizarre childhood.

Only years later did I understand how unsettling it really was and how quickly I'd learned to normalise things no child should have to.

Then again, if you grew up in the 1970s and 80s, normal covered quite a lot of ground.

Sometimes the rules are there for a reason.

Fortunately, I eventually learned that lesson without going back into those woods. And sometimes they're just there to give you a good story later.

# Chapter Four: Reflections

**Mini-Theme:**
*Belonging, boldness, and the sting of silence*

When have you walked into a new environment and felt instantly out of sync with everyone around you?

What bold or impulsive choices did you make as a teenager to try to belong, and how did they shape you?

How did you cope with moments where people “ignored you, overlooked you, or acted like you weren’t there”?

What parts of your personality were misunderstood when you were younger, and how do you honour them now?

# Chapter Five: Reflections

**Mini-Theme:**
*Solitude, self-trust, and quiet resilience*

When have you found yourself suddenly alone and unsure of where you belonged?

What did solitude teach you about your own company and your own strength?

What small rituals or comforts help you feel grounded when you're navigating loneliness?

When have you discovered that being alone didn't mean being unworthy?

# Chapter Six: Reflections

**Mini-Theme:**
*Boundaries, Fear, and the Things We Normalised Too Young*

What experiences from your childhood did you brush off at the time, but now recognise as unsettling or inappropriate?

When did you first realise that adults couldn't always protect you in the ways you needed?

How do you care for the version of you who had to make sense of things far beyond your years?

What stories from your past reveal your strength in ways you didn't see at the time?

Chapter 7

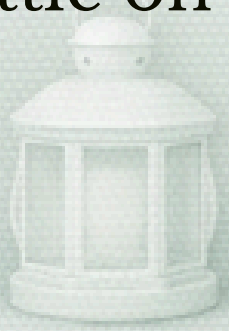
Exit Oakridge High,
Enter Trenton

Chapter 8

Kingsley Park High School:
Reinvention, Again

Chapter 9

My Hilarious YTS Escapades: Or,
How Not to Settle on a Career Path



## Chapter 7

# Exit Oakridge High, Enter Trenton

**Mini-Theme:**
*Instability, Reinvention, and Growing Up in the Gaps*

In 1983, my parents uprooted us again, this time to Rose Road in Trenton. My parents were… let's say, self-centred. Me and my two siblings were more like extensions of their relationship than individuals.

Mum had her own struggles, the kind that had led her to seek help as a teenager.
Dad had a manipulative streak that shaped the atmosphere of the house far more than any of us realised at the time.

We kids were squeezed into the smallest bedroom imaginable. Posters peeling off the walls, one wardrobe between three of us, and a nightly battle over who got the least lumpy bit of mattress. Privacy wasn't just limited. It was a mythical creature we'd heard rumours about but never actually seen.

Their choices meant constant reinvention for us: new schools, new rules, new versions of ourselves. We didn't have the language for instability. We just lived it.

We didn't stay anywhere long enough to put down roots, but we got very good at packing them up.

And that, dear reader, was my comedic journey through the halls of Oakridge High: a little drama, a touch of trauma, and a whole lot of awkward encounters.

Curtain closes, laughter track rolls.

## Chapter 8

# Kingsley Park High School: Reinvention, Again

**Mini-Theme:**
*Identity, Adaptation, and the Slow Return to Self*

***Next stop:*** Kingsley Park High School, a large comprehensive on the far side of Trenton, known for its sprawling campus, endless walkways, and a student body that operated on organised chaos.

I started a couple of terms into the third year. By then, I'd had enough school changes to know one thing for sure: I wasn't going to make the same mistakes I had before. So for the first few months, I observed.

Quietly. Carefully. I kept my personality tucked away like contraband.

I'd already learned that arriving as the loud new girl could attract attention I didn't necessarily want. Keeping my head down felt like the safer option.

But by the start of the fourth year, the real me slipped out again. I became kind of popular, though not in the best-friend sense.

I didn't have a single close friend there. I floated between groups, chatting to anyone and everyone. A free spirit, or a social nomad, depending on who you asked.

My mouth still got me into trouble. I was banned from some lessons entirely and sent to the woodwork room with the head of year.

Other times, I was trusted to study alone in the common room,

***Why, I'll never know.***

Leaving me unsupervised was a level of optimism I'd done absolutely nothing to earn.

But here's the strange part: despite the chaos, I felt more accepted at Kingsley than anywhere else. Maybe because I wasn't trying to fit in.

Maybe because I'd finally stopped apologising for who I was.

For the first time, fitting in didn't feel quite so important.

Another school, another reinvention, but this time it felt less like survival and more like becoming myself.

## Chapter 9

# My Hilarious YTS Escapades: Or, How Not to Settle on a Career Path

**Mini-Theme:**
*False Starts, Finding Your Feet, and Laughing Through the Chaos*

If you ever feel lost after leaving school, just remember I blazed a trail of short-lived jobs that would make even the most indecisive squirrel proud.

*Picture it:*

July 1986, just before my sixteenth birthday. I left school with all the confidence of someone who'd accidentally worn slippers instead of shoes and dived headfirst into the Brookhaven indoor market job scene.

*First stop:* the meat counter. Six weeks. Turns out, handling dead animals before lunchtime isn't for everyone. Particularly when you're trying not to think too hard about where sausages come from.

*Next:* a café in Redwood Market. That adventure fizzled out in under a month, mostly because I confused a cappuccino with a cup of soup.

In my defence, neither customer seemed entirely sure what I'd served them.

*Then:* the biscuit counter back in Brookhaven. My career soared for a glorious single day. One. Day. Even the biscuits lasted longer than I did, and they were on clearance.

So off I marched to the careers advisers. They pitched me the YTS (Youth Training Scheme) with all the gusto of a used car salesman. “You’ll get £27–£30 a week, maybe even £35!”

They beamed as if I’d just won the lottery.

**YTS:** where school leavers like me learned to survive on roughly the cost of a decent takeaway while being introduced to the wonderful world of work.

The idea was simple. Put teenagers into workplaces, pay them just enough to keep showing up, and call it training.

Welcome to 1980s Britain.

# Chapter Seven: Reflections

**Mini-Theme:**
*Instability, Reinvention, and Growing Up in the Gaps*

How did the atmosphere of your childhood home shape the way you learned to cope, adapt, or stay small?

When did you first realise that the adults around you were struggling in ways that affected you?

What did your family's choices teach you about your own needs, even if those lessons came without words?

What would you say to the younger you who kept adjusting to everyone else's choices?

# Chapter Eight: Reflections

**Mini-Theme:**
*Identity, Adaptation, and the Slow Return to Self*

What parts of yourself have you hidden in order to feel safe, accepted, or unnoticed?

Have you ever been kind of popular but still felt like you didn't truly belong anywhere?

How did authority figures respond to your personality when you were younger, and how did that shape your confidence?

What version of yourself emerged when you finally stopped apologising for who you were?

# Chapter Nine: Reflections

**Mini-Theme:**
*False Starts, Finding Your Feet, and Laughing Through the Chaos*

What early jobs or responsibilities taught you more about yourself than about the work itself?

When have you tried something, realised instantly it wasn't for you, and moved on anyway?

How did you feel during times when you were expected to figure out your future before you even knew who you were?

What did your teenage work experiences teach you about resilience, self-belief, or survival?

Chapter 10

Ashford College: Doodles, Disaster & the Fire Extinguisher

Chapter 11

Budget Basket Rescue

Chapter 12

Budget Basket Revenge



## Chapter 10

# Ashford College: Doodles, Disaster & the Fire Extinguisher

**Mini-Theme:**
*Belonging, Creativity, and the Chaos of Trying to Fit In*

***Next stop:***

Ashford College, a creative and technical college split neatly between the sensible future-university crowd and the rest of us, who were just trying to figure out life one doodle at a time.

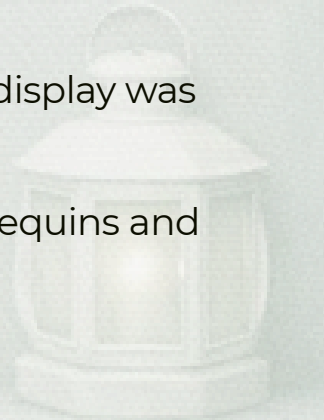
I ended up at the far right, at the back, which felt less political and more teacher couldn't see me doodling.
Each of us had a 3ft x 3ft board to create designs, or, in my case, just enough space to nap without anyone noticing.

The plan was simple: nail a stylish career in fashion and marketing. Six weeks in the classroom, then out into the wild for interviews with YTS partner companies.

I even interviewed at Kendal's in Manchester for a role in shop and window design.

This was before the internet, when a killer window display was as close as you got to TikTok virality.

My masterpiece probably involved too many mannequins and not enough clothes.



I’ve always been a compulsive doodler and note-jotter, scribbling my deepest thoughts and questionable poetry on any available scrap.

I soon learned the hard way that leaving your inner monologue on paper isn’t always wise, especially if you’re suspended from college for extracurricular creativity.

Old habits die hard. My past at various schools left me a bit on edge, like a hedgehog at a balloon party.

At first, college was fine. I made a couple of mates, and we’d hang out in the precinct for lunch.

But gradually, they started "just popping to the shop" and conveniently never coming back.

At first, I told myself I was imagining it.
Then it happened again.
And again.
My confidence plummeted.

***Plot twist:*** I was not, in fact, the main character.

So, in true sitcom fashion, I decided to win them back with the worst plan imaginable.

Looking back, if there had been a competition for poor decision-making, I was about to set a record.

I set off a fire extinguisher in the classroom, covering everything and everyone in a fine layer of white powder.

I thought it would be hilarious. Turns out, I was the only one who thought that.

Sometimes the wrong path is the only way to find out what doesn't fit.

Mine just happened to leave a lot of cleaning up behind.

## Chapter 11

# Budget Basket Rescue

**Mini-Theme:**
*Second Chances, Survival Jobs, and Unexpected Lifelines*

The college didn’t kick me out completely. Apparently, I was too much of a comedic asset. Instead, they gave me a lifeline: find a retail job, and you keep your YTS gig.

Luckily, I'd already been a Saturday assistant at the Budget Basket hardware store in Stonebrook, owned by my friend Sarah's aunt and uncle.

It was the kind of place where you could buy anything from a hammer to a tin of paint thinner and still leave with gossip about who'd been spotted in the precinct.
Half hardware store, half unofficial community centre.

I asked if they’d take me on full-time, and they did.

***Boom:*** double income. YTS allowance and a wage.

My dad even worked in Stonebrook, so I got a lift to work. Not always home, mind you. But hey, you win some, you walk some.

Did I miss college or those classmates? Not a chance.

For the first time in a while, I felt as though I'd landed somewhere I wasn't waiting to leave.

Sometimes a little chaos is the best way to stumble onto your path, or at least into a story worth retelling. Mine just happened to involve a fire extinguisher and a hardware store.

## Chapter 12

# Budget Basket Revenge

**Mini-Theme:**
*Loyalty, Embarrassment, and the People Who Fight for Us (Even Badly)*

Of course, my triumphant double-income scheme didn't last long.

Within weeks, I was sacked from Budget Basket.

Apparently, my gift for chaos extended to hardware retail.

Getting fired was embarrassing. Watching my dad deal with it was much, much worse.

My dad, never one to let injustice slide, marched straight round to the shop and chased the owner through the aisles like it was an episode of Gladiators.

*Picture it:* two grown men weaving between buckets, paint tins, and spanners, while customers pretended to browse screws they absolutely did not need.

If nothing else, it was the best entertainment Stonebrook had seen all week, and possibly the only time a hardware store doubled as prime-time comedy.

Mortifying as it was, nobody could ever accuse my dad of not being in my corner.

# Chapter Ten: Reflections

**Mini-Theme:**
*Belonging, Creativity, and the Chaos of Trying to Fit In*

What parts of yourself did you hide, shrink, or disguise in order to blend in — and what happened when those parts resurfaced?

How did your creative expression show up when you were younger, and how was it received by others?

When have you mistaken being included for being valued?

When have you realised that the “wrong path” was actually redirecting you toward something truer?

# Chapter Eleven: Reflections

**Mini-Theme:**
*Second Chances, Survival Jobs, and Unexpected Lifelines*

When have you taken a job out of necessity and later realised it taught you something valuable?

How did your family's involvement — or lack of it shape your experience of responsibility?

What did you learn about yourself during times when you were simply trying to stay afloat?

How do you look back now on the version of you who kept going, even when the path made no sense?

# Chapter Twelve: Reflections

**Mini-Theme:**
*Loyalty, Embarrassment, and the People Who Fight for Us (Even Badly)*

What stories from your past now make you laugh, even if they didn't at the time?

How do you look back on the younger you who kept stumbling into trouble but always found a way through?

How did your family respond when things went wrong for you, and how did that shape your sense of safety or embarrassment?

What does this moment reveal about the people who influenced your early life — their flaws, their love, their chaos?

Chapter 13
The Solicitor’s Desk

Chapter 14
Act Two: The Unexpected Script

Final Reflection
My Reflections and Lessons



## Chapter 13

# The Solicitor's Desk

**Mini-Theme:**
*Imposter Syndrome, Growing Up Fast, and Holding It Together (Mostly)*

The college, now desperate to keep me on their books, scrambled to find me another placement. Their solution? A receptionist job at a solicitor's office.

From biscuit counters and fire extinguishers to answering phones in a place where people wore suits and spoke in hushed tones, it was like being dropped into a parallel universe.

My job was simple: look professional, which is tricky when your natural resting state is 'accident waiting to happen.'

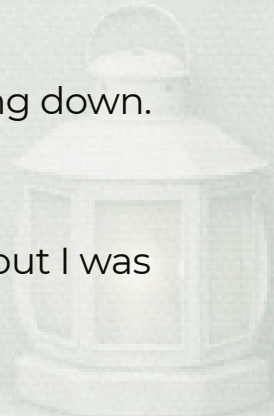
Still, I managed to sit behind the desk, surrounded by filing cabinets and the faint smell of legal stationery, without setting off any other fire extinguisher. For me, that counted as progress.

***The Plot Twist:***

For the first time in a while, life seemed to be settling down.

And then it didn't.

Within months of starting at the solicitor's, I found out I was pregnant.



Suddenly, the sitcom of teenage errors had a brand-new storyline, one that would carry me far beyond Oakridge High, Budget Basket, and even Ashford College.

The laugh track faded, the lights shifted, and the script flipped.

This wasn't just another misadventure.

This was the moment everything changed.

## Chapter 14

# Act Two: The Unexpected Script

**Mini-Theme:**
*Growing Up Overnight, Reality Hitting Hard, and Owning Your Story*

Pregnancy at sixteen wasn't exactly in my five-year plan, mostly because I didn't have a five-year plan.

My "career trajectory" up to that point had been meat counters, biscuit stalls, and one very ill-fated fire extinguisher stunt.

Motherhood?

That was a whole new genre.

One minute I was answering phones at a solicitor's office, trying not to trip over the filing cabinet.

The next, I was staring at a pregnancy test, realising my life had just been rewritten without my permission.

It wasn't a punchline.

It wasn't even a plot twist I could laugh off.

But it was real, and it was mine.

Looking back, it's funny how none of it felt dramatic at the time. I honestly thought I was fine and everyone else was just a bit daft.

To me, it was all just normal life.

If anything, I assumed the world needed to catch up with me.

And in that moment, the comedy of teenage errors became something else entirely.

Not a lesson.

Not a warning.

Just the beginning of a life I never planned, but one I was quietly being prepared for all along.

# Final Reflection
## My Reflections and Lessons

**Mini-Theme:**
*Hindsight, Healing, and the Quiet Construction of Resilience*

Looking back now, I can see the chaos for what it was: constant upheaval, instability, and a childhood stitched together with quick goodbyes and even quicker reinventions.

But at the time, I didn't feel broken or lost.

I genuinely thought I was fine and everyone else was just a bit daft.

It's only with hindsight that I can see how much I was navigating without realising it.

The moves, the schools, the loneliness, the reinventions. None of it felt dramatic back then. I thought that was just life.

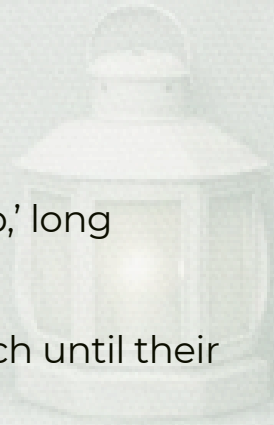
I didn't know that some of the things I brushed off were actually harsh.

But maybe that innocence protected me.

I didn’t analyse; I didn’t spiral.

People used to tell me, ‘Gosh, Vicky, you’re too deep,’ long before I even understood what that meant.

It’s funny, really: the kind of depth people don’t reach until their fifties was just how my mind worked at fourteen.



I didn’t have the words for it, but I felt everything, and I made sense of it in the only way I knew how:

I adapted.

And that ability to adapt, to keep going, to find humour in the madness, and to stay myself even when everything around me kept shifting became the backbone of everything that came next.

If there's one thing these early years taught me, it's that resilience doesn't always look like strength.

Sometimes it looks like a kid who keeps adapting because she doesn't realise she's supposed to fall apart.

I didn't have the language for trauma or instability back then.

I thought it was all just life.

But survival isn't always dramatic.

Sometimes it's ordinary.

Sometimes it's invisible.

Sometimes it's a girl weighing potatoes in her parents' shop at twelve.

Or walking into a new school with a brave face.

Or laughing off things that should probably have been taken more seriously.

And yet every one of those moments shaped me.



They taught me how to adapt.

How to read a room.

How to stand alone.

How to reinvent myself without losing myself.

How to keep my humour even when life wasn't funny.

How to trust my instincts long before I trusted anything else.

Most of all, they taught me that resilience isn't something you're given.

It's something you build, piece by piece, without even realising you're doing it.

I didn't know it then, but these years were preparing me for the biggest shift of my life.

Everything I'd learned, the grit, the depth, the humour, and the ability to survive chaos, would soon be tested in ways I couldn't imagine.

The next act wasn't just a continuation.

It was a transformation.

And this time, I wouldn't just be surviving.

# Chapter Thirteen: Reflections

**Mini-Theme:**
*Imposter Syndrome, Growing Up Fast, and Holding It Together (Mostly)*

What did you learn about yourself in moments where you had to look competent before you felt it?

How did you navigate spaces where you felt out of place, unprepared, or “not the type”?

What parts of your personality were misunderstood as “trouble” when they were really signs of creativity, energy, or sensitivity?

What does this chapter reveal about your ability to adapt, even when the setting made no sense?

# Chapter Fourteen: Reflections

**Mini-Theme:**
*Growing Up Overnight, Reality Hitting Hard, and Owning Your Story*

How did you make sense of responsibility, fear, or uncertainty at an age when you were still figuring out who you were?

What parts of your teenage self do you now see with compassion rather than judgement?

What would you tell the younger you who thought she was “fine” when she was actually surviving?

How did this moment shape your understanding of strength, identity, and adulthood?

# Reflections and Lessons

**Mini-Theme:**
*Hindsight, Healing, and the Quiet Construction of Resilience*

What parts of your childhood felt “normal” at the time but reveal deeper truths when you look back now?

How did innocence — or simply not knowing — protect you from the weight of what you were living through?

When did you first realise that adapting wasn’t just a skill — it was survival?

What emotions surface when you revisit the younger version of yourself who kept going without understanding the magnitude of what she faced?

# Reflections and Lessons *Cont.*

**Mini-Theme:**
*Hindsight, Healing, and the Quiet Construction of Resilience*

How did humour, imagination, or distraction help you cope with instability or uncertainty?

What strengths did you build quietly, without applause, simply by surviving what you didn't have the language for?

How did constant reinvention shape your identity — and what parts of you remained unshakeable?

How have your early experiences shaped the way you show up for yourself and others today?

# Acknowledgement

This journal is dedicated to everyone who has ever lived through the kind of childhood that didn't make sense until adulthood caught up.

To those who learned humour as a shield, resilience as a reflex, and reinvention as a survival skill.

To those who brushed off the hard things because no one told you they were hard.

To those who carried more than anyone realised.

To those who felt alone in a crowded room, or invisible in a noisy house.

To those who didn't have the language for what they were living through, but lived through it anyway.

This is for you.

For your courage, your grit, your humour, your heart.

For the child you were and the adult you've become.

You are seen.

You are understood.

You are not alone.



# Final Note

If there's one truth I hope you carry with you from these pages, it's this:

You didn't have to fall apart to prove you were struggling.

You didn't have to name it for it to matter.

You didn't have to understand it for it to shape you.

Your story, every messy, funny, painful, brave chapter, has value.

And now, as you step into your own next act, may you do so with the knowledge that you've already survived more than you realise.

You've already grown more than you give yourself credit for.

You've already become someone worth being proud of.
And you're only just getting started.



