

First published 2017

Exisle Publishing Pty Ltd
'Moonrising', Narone Creek Road, Wollombi, NSW
2325, Australia
P.O. Box 60-490, Titirangi, Auckland 0642, New
Zealand
www.exislepublishing.com

Copyright © 2017 in text: Emma Grey and Audrey
Thomas

Emma Grey and Audrey Thomas assert the moral
right to be identified as the authors of this work.

All rights reserved. Except for short extracts for
the purpose of review, no part of this book may
be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or
transmitted in any form or by any means, whether
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording
or otherwise, without prior written permission from
the publisher.

A CiP record for this book is available from the
National Library of Australia.

ISBN 978-1-925335-32-3

Designed by Tracey Gibbs
Typeset in Avenir LT Std.
Printed in China

This book uses paper sourced under ISO 14001
guidelines from well-managed forests and other
controlled sources.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Disclaimer

While this book is intended as a general
information resource and all care has been taken
in compiling the contents, neither the author nor
the publisher and their distributors can be held
responsible for any loss, claim or action that may
arise from reliance on the information contained in
this book. As each person and situation is unique,
it is the responsibility of the reader to consult a
qualified professional regarding their personal care.

I ~~DON'T~~
HAVE TIME
15-MINUTE WAYS
TO SHAPE A LIFE
YOU LOVE

EMMA GREY & AUDREY THOMAS

EXISLE
PUBLISHING

'This book spoke to me from the very first page. Finally, a time-management book for real people by real people. It was interesting and engaging with stories and anecdotes that made me laugh, cry and nod my head in agreement. If you only read one self-help book this year, make it this one.'

Alison Abernethy

'THE "MY 15 MINUTES" PROGRAM HAS RE-AWOKEN MY PASSION FOR LIFE. I DIDN'T EVEN REALIZE THAT I HAD LOST IT AMID THE DAILY GRIND, BUT NOW I HAVE SO MUCH MORE ENTHUSIASM AND ENERGY.'

Beth Cavallari

'Thanks so much! Some simple things that we forget, and the reminder that we need. And fantastic ideas we'd never think of. Loved the program!'

L.K.

'This book has it all — laughs and tears, advice and support and, most of all, the encouragement most of us need to just get started! Learning how to make the most of the smallest chunks of time has made a huge difference in what I achieve. Thanks for the inspiration!'

Alison Bailey

'I knew I would like this program from the moment I read the description! The biggest thing I have taken away is that now if a task seems insurmountable, I think "I'll just spend 15 minutes on it". It's a mindset that can help everyone.'

Anne George

'THIS PROGRAM IS AMAZING AT REMINDING YOU HOW MUCH IS POSSIBLE AND IT ONLY TAKES 15 MINUTES AT A TIME. IT RE-ENERGIZED AND RE-IGNITED ME AS AN INDIVIDUAL, SETTING ME ON A NEW PATH OF SELF-DISCOVERY AND SELF-WORTH WHICH BENEFITS EVERY ASPECT OF MY LIFE.'

J.L.

'The storytelling style of this book made it unique in the genre for me. There are few traditional time-management books that provoke regular tears and "ah ha" moments the way this one did! Thoroughly recommended.'

Sarah Turner

'I am completely impressed with Emma and Audrey's professional and personal style of supportive coaching. They have profoundly changed my life, my outlook, my beliefs about myself. I am a stronger, more confident person at home, work and in my relationships with others. I feel this and others close to me have noticed, too.'

Fiona McIntosh

'LOVED THIS BOOK! A PAGE TURNER FROM START TO FINISH WITH AUDREY AND EMMA'S ENGAGING STYLE OF WRITING CONVEYING THEIR RELATABLE STORIES.'

Michele Farrell

EMMA GREY is a work-life specialist who uses a suite of innovative concepts and tools to provide organizations and individuals with practical solutions to the modern challenge of 'having it all'. Emma runs seminars, workshops and executive coaching, writes regularly for national media, and together with Audrey, is co-founder of the highly successful 'My 15 Minutes' program (www.my15minutes.com.au).

AUDREY THOMAS is an experienced coach and facilitator with a background in project and change management, learning and development, and operations management. After a corporate career spanning the UK, Europe and North America, she now specializes in working with individual clients and teams to discover and develop their untapped potential and improve effectiveness.

**TO OUR PARENTS
FOR GIVING US ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD**

**AND TO JEFF
FOR THE PRECIOUS TIMES**

CONTENTS

I need more time!	X
Introduction: Why such a rush?	1
I'll be happy when ...	21
Mindset Gremlin 1:	
When you think you're not enough (but you are)	37
Mindset Gremlin 2:	
When you think you're on your own (but you're not)	69
Mindset Gremlin 3:	
When you think you've got to get it right (but you don't)	97
Mindset Gremlin 4:	
When you're feeling stuck (but you're not)	127
Mindset Gremlin 5:	
When you think it's too late (but it isn't)	155
Final thoughts	183
Epilogue	193
Acknowledgments	194
Appendix:	
If you thought it was just you ...	196
References	200
Index	205

I NEED MORE TIME!

BY ABIGAIL TURNER, AGED NINE

My name is Abigail and I am in 4P.

My topic is 'I Need More Time' and you may be wondering, for what?

Well, to do my homework, eat chocolate, ride a horse, go shopping.

I think we should have 48 hours in a day and 24 hours for a night.

But the downside would be longer school hours, longer homework, longer time your parents have to nag you. It would take a longer time to eat your breakfast and you would get to school late every day ...

Then you would get shouted at by the teacher because the teacher doesn't like you being late. More time in the world would mean more time sitting in the dentist's chair and I already sit in there too long as it is! And what if more time meant having to wait longer for your cake to bake in the oven? Oh no! That would be a disaster!

But, on the upside, if we had twice as much time each day and night, you would have more time to see your friends and travel to meet people in other countries. And another really good thing if we had more time is there would probably, and hopefully, be fewer wars in the world because people would have more time to get to know each other, and understand each other. Then maybe we wouldn't have wars because there wouldn't be anything to fight about.

And what about me?

Personally, if I had more time, I would do all the things I love most in the world:

- Go on the computer
- Go trail riding every day after school with my favourite horse Sooty
- Drink my favourite cookies-and-cream milkshake at Oliver Brown
- Go to Fiji on a holiday
- Watch *How to Train Your Dragon* all day
- Play netball
- Climb every tree and wall I can find
- Go shopping for toys and books, especially books, and lots of toys too
- Make models with my dad
- Play ninjas with my sister in the backyard; and
- Go for walks with my mum, without my sister!

What's that you say? I'm out of time? Oh dear, *I need more time!*

INTRODUCTION

WHY SUCH A RUSH?

Emma:

I tried not to think about the ravenous parking meter as I perched for six hours on an unforgiving plastic seat in the arrivals hall at Canberra airport. My then fourteen-year-old, Sophie, and her best friend were hoping to catch a glimpse of American YouTuber Colleen Ballinger. Colleen's alter ego, the hapless 'Miranda Sings', has a cult following so fanatical her madcap spoof on self-help books was propelled to the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list a mere 24 hours after its pre-launch. Perhaps I was quietly fangirling about that too ...

We knew Colleen had performed at the Melbourne Comedy Festival the evening before. We knew she was scheduled to perform in Canberra that night. The missing detail was which flight she'd be on, which is why we'd found ourselves at a virtually empty airport just after dawn.

The girls were resplendent in Miranda's trademark costume: a men's striped shirt tucked into red track pants

with 'Haters back off' emblazoned on the rear, clashing pink Crocs and too much red lipstick. I was dressed normally and held onto the first of several strong cappuccinos, hoping that this wouldn't be a wild goose chase. Quietly lurking in a security-rich environment for hours with the teens decked out as identical nerds, clutching glittery posters, was bound to attract attention. The girls were stared at, photographed by tourists and even approached by the police at one point.

'Who are you waiting for?'

'Miranda Sings.'

'Who?'

Exactly.

Eventually, in the early afternoon we reached a point where we just wanted to go home. At least I did. It was reminiscent of the transition stage of labour. I honestly couldn't do this any longer. I wanted an epidural.

Turning to Facebook, I hoped to be galvanized by messages of support from my friends. What I received instead was more along the lines of: *'Five hours? Are you crazy? Who has time to waste doing this on a Sunday? Don't you have better things to do?'*

I did have other things. But were they better?

Somewhere in the sixth hour we turned our bloodshot eyes towards the arrivals gate for the umpteenth time. Were we hallucinating? Or was that *her* (wearing a normal amount of lipstick and normal clothes)? As the escalator conveyed the online superstar towards us, along with her then fiancé (also a famous YouTuber) I sent a silent prayer to the Gods of Social Media and Celebrity Chasing: *Please take a second to stop and say hello!*

The automatic glass doors parted. She glanced up from her phone, saw the girls, broke into a smile and went straight into their arms with the type of hug usually reserved for long-lost friends. Then she introduced us to her sister (another YouTuber), posed for photos and

promised to follow them both on Instagram. When you're fourteen, and you've been waiting six and a half hours to meet your online idol, an Instagram follow *is your life*.

But this story isn't about any of that. Not really.

Fast-forward a few weeks, and the same two girls were upset when I collected them from school. A friend's mum had developed worrying symptoms of memory loss and confusion. She hadn't recognized her own child. The likely diagnosis was early-onset dementia. In her forties. My age.

That was the moment for me. I thought back to the hours we'd invested in our loopy airport adventure and knew with unwavering certainty that I wanted to spend *more* time hanging around arrivals lounges with teenage fangirls. Not less.

Everything changed the day she figured out there was exactly enough time for the important things in her life.

Brian Andreas

HERE IS OUR PROBLEM, IS IT NOT?

We live in a time and culture where exhaustion is a status symbol. If you're not frantic or flat out — if you don't have too much to do and not nearly enough time in which to do it — eyebrows are raised.

'How have you been?' someone asks.

'Busy!' you chirp, because it's the only answer you've ever learned to the question. 'How was your weekend?'

'Need a holiday just to get over it!'

'Gah!'

'Insane!'

'Crazy!'

'Ludicrous!'

'Actually, everything's cruising along quite calmly,' nobody interjects, ever. 'Work's under control. The house is organized. Had a date with my partner on the weekend, and devoured two novels ...'

Eh?

Crazy schedules!

Ships passing in the night!

Me-time? Ha.

That's the game! None of this freewheeling about lackadaisical weekends and under-control workloads and free time and romance! This isn't a gap year.

Women of a certain age and stage have decided we're officially swamped, as a species. One does not simply *swim*. One *splashes* dramatically in a sea of largely self-inflicted over-commitment, despite people throwing lifebuoys and yelling that you can actually touch the bottom if you just stop struggling and stand up.

'HURRY SICKNESS'

Author James Gleick refers to what he calls 'hurry sickness' — that feeling of being trapped as we lament the hectic jobs (which we applied for) and drive the kids to a barrage of after-school activities (which we signed them up to) that we squeeze around second degrees and diplomas (which we enrolled in) as if the whole shebang is not a circus of our own making. Even when we do have breathing space, the story we tell tends to be one of being time-poor, stretched and tired. Because that's the story that is valued in our society. It's the story over which so many of us bond — sometimes for hours, while we soak the sponge of our precious time in circular conversations about how *there's never enough time ...*

Lean in. Lean out. Push. Pull. Sprint. Collapse. The awkward choreography of modern life jars against the rhythms in our health,

relationships and careers. We crank up the sound until it grates and we can't hear the music any more. We keep spinning across the stage, even when our bodies ache and our minds churn. We dance, not because nobody's watching but because we're worried that everyone is.

And right there, in the midst of too-full lives, jam-packed with 'shoulds' and 'musts' and 'I wish I had's', there are our Miranda Sings moments. There's the colour that's been dimmed or missing from our lives. There are the things we really want to do, and we want to do them *now*, regardless of what else is happening and what people think. There's a state of peace achievable not just during rare breaks away from our normal lives but in the midst of them. And there are the cherished dreams we've swept under the carpet for 'one day' when things are easier and less hectic, and there are fewer people clinging to us.

HOW DO PEOPLE DO IT?

So, I say raise your expectations.
Elongate your process. Lie on your
deathbed with a to-do list a mile long
and smile at the infinite opportunity
granted to you. Create ridiculous
standards for yourself and then savor
the inevitable failure. Learn from
it. Live it. Let the ground crack and
rocks crumble around you because
that's how something amazing grows,
through the cracks ...

Mark Manson

There's no special secret to chasing your dreams, and no secret 'productivity sauce'. People who've shaped lives they love haven't hacked the system or found a magic door into a parallel world with twice as much time, where everything always comes up roses.

The sparkly world of social media tricks us into thinking there's a genetically modified breed of Deliriously Happy People who've somehow slipped through the reality net and appear to be leading super-sized lives. Always smiling. Always winning. Always hitting goals

amidst a flawless regime of self-care and posting motivational quotes to prove it. #nofilter #blessed

We're not talking about the tiny percentage of people whose airbrushed perfection asserts itself from the pages of glossy magazines. It's not the people basking on yachts in designer bikinis, sipping Verve Clicquot from Waterford crystal flutes, that are really the challenge for us here.

It's the woman next door. The one with the up-to-date curriculum vitae and tidy car, whose kids seem biologically programmed to manage more than one spoonful of breakfast cereal without a choreographed fanfare from a marching band. Or it's the woman above you in your Facebook news feed, the one with the partner or babies or career or family life or holidays or home or financial security or hobbies you crave. Or the one with *all* of that, tied in a bow.

It's tempting to gaze longingly at the lives of others, wishing we knew their secrets. Tempting, and dangerous. Because, if your neighbour doesn't have a breakfast-cereal problem, she'll almost certainly have a problem in the bedroom. Or the boardroom. Or the fitting room. There will be some 'room' in her house — some window of her seemingly Class A life that is shielded from public view — from which she gazes longingly at the life of the woman next door, or the one below her in the news feed ... *wishing she knew your secret.*

Lives we love aren't sculpted by stomping darkly through our minds in steel-capped Doc Martens, kicking ourselves each time we don't measure up. They're shaped when we tread lightly through our mess, treating chinks and fractures with a homemade balm of humour-scented self-compassion.

We have to stop worrying what other people think and get clear on what we think. Clear on what matters most — to us. From there, it's a simple matter of just getting on with it. Right?

Well, it might be simple, were it not for the relentless chatter in our minds, telling us we don't have time, we're not ready, we can't be bothered, it's too late, it won't work or we'd rather be doing something else.

'Adulging!' Who knew it would be this tricky?

CONFESSION ...

It's the third day of January, and we're three days into the serious resolution we made to chip away at a little part of this book each day from now until we're contractually obliged to deliver it to our publisher in six months' time. Which means we have six months (minus three days) to squeeze 50,000 words around all the other things: our jobs, families and any unforeseen challenges that may crop up in our lives.

It seems doable if we tackle it methodically. Thus far, though, *hmm ...*

On Day One, we opened a new Word document, typed the heading and changed the font to Helvetica. On Day Two, we had good intentions, but spent the afternoon on Netflix watching a documentary about the Backstreet Boys and redecorating a child's bedroom respectively. No matter! We thought we'd get around to book-writing in the evening. But didn't.

It's now Day Three, and the first day we've actually sat down and done what we committed to do — which was simply to 'get on with any bit of it'. No excuses.

What stopped us until now (and we're not just talking about those three days, but the previous three months since we signed the contract) was a serious case of 'overwhelm'. After all, there are days when we struggle to churn out a 600-word blog post. A whole book seems a hefty thing.

It's like any long-term goal: substantial weight loss, a long course of study, spring-cleaning the house — at the beginning it has the

look and feel of Everest. And we've had the look and feel of people who've made it as far as Base Camp and now have a lovely publishing contract to show for our efforts, plus a blank Word document with nice Helvetica headings that we're seriously considering swapping to Verdana because it's super-important to invest several days getting the formatting just so.

It hasn't helped that Emma is co-writing a musical based on her teen novel with a composer friend from school. Staying up late swapping lyrics and song ideas is fun. Writing the musical based on an existing book seems *easier* than starting this new one, so there's a war waging: 'Must do the harder project. Might throw together a few lyrics first.' Hours pass. A song is written, and another day goes by with massive progress in the area with no deadline or contract and nobody to let down if it doesn't get done. 'We can't leave this till the last minute!' we say to each other. 'We can't pull an all-nighter to produce a 50,000-word manuscript.'

Getting the contract for this book was the single most exhilarating career development for us both last year. It meant the publisher had faith in our ability to offer something fresh in the field of productivity and self-improvement. It gives us an opportunity to share the stories we love, and expertise and ideas that it's taken us years of work and study to build. One of the reasons the publisher placed that trust in us is because we're hired by some of the world's top companies to lead people to thrive professionally and personally. Our online programs have attracted thousands of busy people seeking help to manage their lives.

Another reason we were asked to write a book is because we tell it like it is. At a work-life presentation for a 'big four' accounting firm a few years ago, an audience member came up afterwards and said, 'I nearly didn't come. I thought you'd be these impossibly together, stick-thin figures preaching about your seven-step system to get this stuff right ... and it was refreshing to see you're not like that *at all!*'

Oka-ay!

Just quietly, there are days when we feel like the Jennifer Saunders and Joanna Lumley of the time-management field. While others are doing the 'top ten things that all successful people do before

breakfast', we're stealing '5 more minutes' and wrangling school lunches in our pyjamas. You won't find us walking over hot coals to master our mindset. You'll find us stumbling over Lego, and lots of it, which is arguably more courageous.

There's a motivational style that's big on eternal optimism and relentless reframing and overcoming. It works brilliantly for some. Others are left wondering what they're doing wrong when they inevitably find themselves having days where optimism goes AWOL. Days where they don't want to 'reframe'. They just want to 'sit' for a while as disappointment or sadness or fear washes through them.

No matter which tools we use to accomplish what we want to get done, the reality is that 'life' happens. Our glorious, complex inner 'human being' emerges.

KINDSIGHT

There are times when we glance around, desperately seeking a grown-up to fix our situation or tell us what to do and we're horrified to realize there is no one ahead of us in the queue. We're up! All we really want is to have a proper meltdown or run away, and we're urged to 'manage our state' or write gratitude lists or meditate. These are immensely helpful techniques, but techniques that are easy to ignore in rebellious, human moments, when our 'better judgment' appears to be sitting this one out.

That's when we need to deploy bucket-loads of what author Karen Salmansohn refers to as 'kindsight'. That's hindsight with kindness, because there isn't a person amongst us who isn't doing the best we can, with what we have, where we are, knowing what we know at a certain moment in time. We're doing all of that with a unique cocktail of external pressures, laced with success and failure in different measures.

The two of us are proud of what we've accomplished and how we handle things a lot of the time. We achieve things in our lives, careers and families that feel really important and valued and fun. Our glasses are almost always half full. We are dream chasers. We make some

great things happen that bring us and other people joy, and we have lots of exciting future plans.

But it's not all sunshine. We mess things up. This book isn't intended to offer an unrealistically upbeat approach with little tolerance for the 'crunchy' days that end in tears (our own), when we scramble over the finish line and flop into our beds wondering where the day went and what we did wrong. We share our deepest failures openly, as normalizing what's hard is half the battle.

Bridget Jones said, 'It is a truth universally acknowledged that when one part of your life starts going okay, another falls spectacularly to pieces.' While writing this book, other parts of our lives and careers inevitably flailed in the manuscript's wake. It wasn't pretty, but we took comfort in J.K. Rowling's perspective: 'People very often say to me, "How did you do it? How did you raise a baby and write a book?" And the answer is I didn't do housework for four years. I am not superwoman! Living in squalor — that was the answer!'

People rarely achieve anything worthwhile
without skinned knees and grass stains.

It's not about trying to work out which things will turn to gold if we touch them. It's about learning to let go of our attachment to specific outcomes as we go out and *meet* life. It's about hugging opportunities to our chests, particularly the opportunities that seem just out of reach and make us feel a little shaky.

Audrey:

It's also about laughing it off when that shakiness causes us to stumble, spectacularly.

I was starting work with a new client and it had been 'one of those mornings' on the home front. Still, I'd made it out the door. I was heading in the right direction for my appointment and feeling very grown up while I was on the

phone to Emma, catching up on some business things — relatively well-prepared and organized, despite the chaos with the kids.

As I was driving, and talking, I reached to adjust my necklace, and that's when something quite horrific occurred to me.

'Oh, my God!' I said to Emma on the phone.

'What?'

'I can't tell you!'

'What do you mean you can't tell me?'

I felt sick. *Sick!*

'Emma, I've forgotten to wear a bra,' I admitted, not believing the words that were coming out of my mouth.

It would be nice if I could say she was sympathetic to my plight, but I was almost deafened by her roaring laughter. Here I was, stuck in a traffic jam, heading into the first of several corporate workshops for a new client (wearing a figure-hugging jersey top, I might add) with *no bra!*

Who does that? How? More importantly, how was I going to fix it? I could see a Target store across several lanes, but calling in would make me very late. Late, but respectable. It was my only option.

'What am I going to tell the client?' I asked Emma, while I hurtled into the car park.

She was too busy taking notes about the story as it unfolded. Apparently forgetting to wear a bra while presenting a high-level leadership workshop was a perfect example of embracing our imperfections. I ended the call and fronted up (in more ways than one) to the Target lingerie attendant and said, urgently, 'I've forgotten to wear a bra and have a workshop to present in 40 minutes. I need to find one, change into it and buy it. In that order. Please help me!'

She looked at me as if she understood (what a lunatic I was) and helped me swiftly complete my mission, except that when I went to the service counter my accomplice was

nowhere to be found.

'I'm buying a bra,' I announced to the teenage girl on the counter, 'but I'm already wearing it. I had a ... wardrobe malfunction.'

She nodded and said she knew all about it. Everyone knew, I was sure of it. Emma had probably blogged about it while I was still adjusting the straps in the fitting room ...

As I walked into that training room (in the most comfortable bra I've ever owned, might I mention) I wondered if I was *ever* going to get my act together.

WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR?

This book is for you if you're a real person, battling a voice inside that tells you way too often that, 'You can't' or 'You'll do it later'. Or 'You need more time'. It's for you if you're 'not ready' or 'not good enough'. It's for you if you're consistently putting other people first or deferring precious ideas, or thinking 'I'll be happy when ...'

You *can* do it. Whatever it is.

And you can do it now.

You have all the time you need, no matter how 'busy' you are. We promise.

This is not a flashy, seven-step system to achieving your goals, unveiled by stick figures. It's a collection of down-to-earth true stories interwoven with practical tips — presented as experiments, or what we like to call '15-minute magic' — to help you use your time the way you really want to. It's a plan to help you drop the excuses you're making for not getting on with things that really make a difference. This book is built on a premise that it's possible to ditch the notion that there is not enough time. It's possible to actively shape lives we love by paying attention to what matters most, even if it's just for 15 minutes, or 1/100th of our day. What matters is the time we spend doing meaningful things that we love, personally and professionally. What counts is creating slices of magic in our lives with people who really matter, while we can. *I Don't Have Time* will help you do just that.

If we can call ourselves out on the ways we get in our own way — the habits we entrench, the fears we shrink from, the actions we repeatedly take that move us further from what we crave — we can move ourselves to a fresh starting point. This is a place of true honesty, where our excuses for not starting or not pushing through when things are hard, fall away. A place where our cover is blown. A place where the choices we make that over-fill our days, or that siphon minutes and hours and days and months, even years, into a void of wasted opportunity, are exposed.

It's about the battles we're waging not with 'lack of time' but with something else: overwhelm, disinterest, boredom, disorganization, lack of direction, anxiety or fear, rebellion or any of the other genuine causes for our slower-than-desired pace or stagnation. And this isn't only about making gung-ho progress on our biggest goals. It's about making time to surrender, release and rejuvenate, too. It's about each of us bringing our unique collection of important things to centre stage.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The first chapter of this book, 'I'll be happy when ...', is about mindset and where we're coming from. It's a platform to swim out to and catch your breath on, before we dive into the five themes we've chosen. Each theme represents one of the mindset 'gremlins' that tangle our thinking. You won't make every excuse we've listed in this book, but you will gain an appreciation of just how much untapped power you have over your use of time.

Through the practical, 15-minute experiments we'll show you how simple it can be to make a small difference in your day. Those daily differences can snowball into a much more satisfying life in a short space of time.

Everything you need to make some simple changes right now is contained within these pages. We've also prepared some bonus resources, including videos that will deepen your engagement with the concepts in this book, which you'll find at www.my15minutes.com.au/bookbonus.

Get real, and you'll find you *do* have time. Fill that time with things that move you forward in areas that really colour your life, and you'll start to hear the music again.

WAIT!

Don't read another word until you've stuck your feet in a bucket of warm water.

Seriously.

Maybe you're reading this on a train. Or you're at work in your lunch break. *Are we mad?* You can't just strip off and plunge those feet of yours into a bucket of water in front of your boss! Or perhaps there's a toddler clambering on your lap as you try to read this sentence for the twenty-eighth time. Maybe this book is being batted away by a copy of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* or you've just sat down for the first time today and now we're asking you to get up again and organize to stick your feet in a bucket — have we taken leave of our senses?

Yes, perhaps we have. Perhaps we all have. We spend so much time dashing through frantic lives, dropping things, clambering, that many of us *have* taken leave from the very sensory experiences that have traditionally helped to ground and calm us:

Bare feet on freshly cut grass.

Sunlight twinkling through leaves.

Sand between our toes.

We want this to be more than just a book. We want it to be an experience. Let's call it 'actual reality' (like virtual reality, but real). It's where you get to experience bonus extras in little experiments as we go through the chapters, starting with this one over the page.



Fill a bucket with warm water and grab a towel. Add some of those unopened bath salts, body wash or bubbles that loiter like wallflowers up the back of the bathroom cabinet waiting for 'one day'. Or add a cup of Epsom salts plus a cup of apple cider vinegar. Or if you're out of all that, add nothing. Sit down for 15 minutes

with your feet swishing in the bucket of warm water and stay there!

Nope, not doing it.

Sometimes, the only bubbles you'll notice are the ones made by your own excuses as they rise to the surface, asserting various reasons why you can't stick your feet in a bucket, as simple as it sounds, probably followed in quick succession by, 'This always happens! I can't even do the first task.'

The 'My 15 Minutes' approach is about gently overcoming our natural urge to put things off at the slightest hurdle. It's about challenging the self-talk that gets in the way of us pushing through obstacles, the 'I'll do it later' promises we make to ourselves without following through. This experiment is not about recreating the ambience of a five-star retreat, but about sitting down, slowing down and taking care of yourself — where you are, with what you have, for only a few minutes. If that means doing it with a toddler beside you splashing in a different bucket, do it. If it means doing it when you get home instead of now, do it. If it means doing it with plain warm water and no bubbles, do it. If you don't have a bucket, use the bath. If you don't have a bath, up-end a storage container and use that.

If you do this experiment and you inadvertently kick the container over on the tiles and it saturates all the presents under the Christmas tree, then you'll have recreated an unfortunate accident one of us once had with a homemade foot spa. Sometimes things don't turn out the way we imagine. Maybe you'll settle down to relax and your baby will wake up or the tweens will start squabbling, or your partner

will walk in after a bad day, oblivious, and start ranting about the guy at work. This stuff happens. But not 'every time' as we sometimes convince ourselves, mid-whine. Sometimes, when we give something a go and the experience is thwarted, part of us gives up. Bit by bit, we abandon the idea of making life nicer for ourselves because 'it's too hard' or 'it never works'. What we tell ourselves then is a story that chips away at our potential fulfilment. It's a story we don't have to buy and one that we have the power to change.

YOU MIGHT BE WONDERING

Isn't this process of shaping a life I want meant to be about pushing myself out of my comfort zone and doing brave stuff fearlessly? What's fearless about sticking my feet in a bucket? Can't you challenge me with something big instead?

Chasing a different life and taking risks to make things happen always starts from a place of deep self-worth. Reaching for what we want often means running a gauntlet of obstacles, both real and imagined. Without a solid belief that, 'I deserve this' it's tempting to let those obstacles get the better of us and watch our dreams slip away.

When we've spent a long time being swept along in a current of 'all the things' — nurturing everyone else first and struggling to keep our personal 'show' on the road — prioritizing our own dreams and ambitions can seem too hard. One of our friends discovered this when she embarked on a university course in her forties, posting this on Facebook:

After another week of distractions and disruptions, having still not caught up on my university reading, I am today starting the assignment which is due in a week.

I'm wondering whether it's all worth it. What purpose does this study serve? Is it worth the stress of trying to fit even more deadlines into my busy life? I'm starting to think that, as much as I want to do this, it's just going to end as it has before, with me deciding that it's easier/less stressful to simply prioritize other people and activities rather than focusing time and energy on studying, which seems like a self-indulgent choice at the moment.

A few weeks later, having persevered, the same friend received her first assignment back with a high distinction. We were so pleased that she hadn't surrendered when it had seemed too hard — when fear of failure and succumbing to others' needs or wants had almost tempted her into self-sabotage.

FIRST EQUAL

It doesn't take much to knock us from the branch from which we're trying to fly. When we fall from our perches, as we naturally will while we find our wings, clambering back to that launching point takes some effort. We're only going to put in that effort if we truly believe we are 'first equal' in our lives, and that our goals are worth striving for.

If we can't prioritize something as crucial as our self-care, and if we can't learn to let everything and everyone else go and 'just be' for 15 minutes, then sticking with the bigger goals you'll be encouraged to set later in this book will be that much harder. When you do take a few minutes for a personal indulgence, it's worth paying attention to what goes through your mind. If the chatter is about what we 'should' be doing, and if our minds are darting around to-do lists, frantic about this 'wasted time', then Houston, we've uncovered a problem we need to work through.

If you've let self-care slip, then making this little piece of pampering your first practical step towards boldly claiming the life you'll love is a gentle way to experiment with the concept of 'acting as if'. It means you can give yourself permission to do something regardless of not 'feeling it' yet. It's the 'fake it till you make it' notion and, in this case, it's about acting as if you deserve this 15 minutes of me-time, even if your mind is whirring rebelliously against the idea of prioritizing yourself in this way. Ralph Waldo Emerson said, 'We are always getting ready to live but never living.' Stopping for 15 minutes is a reminder of what 'living' can feel like, particularly if your default state is 'preparing'.

As we move through the following chapters we describe some of the thoughts that cause us to choose inaction over action, invariably leading us into shaping a life we *don't* love — a life that bores or irritates us, one that brings us down and makes it even harder to get motivated. We've made this fun, tangible and life-changing, in steps that are completely manageable, with just a little commitment to follow through. So please, get up and arrange that bucket of water now. You'll love it!

We invite you to jump onto social media and post a likely unglamorous pic of your tired feet in a bucket with an upturned copy of our book on your lap, and the hashtag #Idonthavetimebook like this is the grown-up woman's answer to the Kylie Jenner Lip Challenge. This is not just about spreading the word about the book (but thank you for doing that), but about keeping yourself accountable and helping other readers who search the hashtag to find images of people following through on this small action. Even in the smallest of ways, we shape our lives not by *imagining* how nice it would be to do things like this, but by getting on with it.

I'LL BE HAPPY WHEN ...

Happiness makes up in height for what it lacks in length.

Robert Frost

What does it really mean to create a life you love? We know it's not about perfection. There will always be light and shade. It's not about trying to nail down the emotional butterfly of 'happiness'. It's not having a life free of disappointment, failure or heartbreak, and it's not just the children's movie *Inside Out*, which captures the notion that there's a valid place for all emotions. Social researcher Hugh Mackay expressed it like this: