


CONTENTS


A Message to You	1
Introduction	2
A Note on Foster Care	6
“Think About It”—and Maybe Write About It	7

THE RESILIENCIES 9

INSIGHT (Asking Tough Questions) 10

 I Don't Know What the Word Mommy Means <i>Younique Symone</i>	12
Beauty Is More Than Skin Deep <i>Danielle Wilson</i>	16
Controlling My Temper <i>Christopher A. Bogle</i>	21
The Answer Was Me <i>Elliott Castro</i>	25
Color Me Different <i>Jamal K. Greene</i>	28

INDEPENDENCE (Being Your Own Person). 34

 I Was a Beauty School Sucker <i>Tonya Leslie</i>	36
My Weight Is No Burden <i>Charlene Johnson</i>	40
Losing My Friends to Weed <i>Jamel A. Salter</i>	44
Out, Without a Doubt <i>Craig J. Jaffe</i>	48
I'm Black, He's Puerto Rican . . . So What? <i>Artiqua S. Steed</i>	55

RELATIONSHIPS (Connecting with People Who Matter) 60



All Talk and No Action
Elizabeth Thompson 62

She's My Sister (Not Foster)
Tamara Ballard 66

Bonding Through Cooking
Aurora Breville 70

A Love Too Strong
Tamecka Crawford 77

Learning to Forgive
Christopher A. Bogle 81

INITIATIVE (Taking Charge) 86



It Takes Work to Flirt
Danny Gong 88

My Struggle with Weed
Craig J. Jaffe 93

College Can Be Hell
Tamecka Crawford 96

Poetry Brought Out the Performer in Me
Shaniqua Sockwell 101

How I Graduated
Angi Baptiste 106

CREATIVITY (Using Imagination) 110



How Writing Helps Me
Terry-Ann Da Costa 112

Why I Live in a Fantasy World
Cassandra Thadal 115

Walking Out the Anger
Tamara Ballard 120

HUMOR (Finding What’s Funny) 124



My Hair Is Blue—But I’m Not a Freak!
Lenny Jones 126

How to Survive Shopping with Mom
Chris Kanarick 130

MORALITY (Doing the Right Thing) 134



A Mother to My Mother’s Children
Charlene Johnson 136

No One Spoke Up for Irma
Ana Angélica Pines 141

I’m a Seventeen-Year-Old Therapist
Quantwilla L. Johnson 147

Soldier Girl
Max Morán 150

How I Made Peace with the Past
Paula Byrd 155

The Seven Resiliencies—A Summary 160

About Youth Communication 163

About Project Resilience. 167

Glossary 170

Guide to Topics. 171

Index 174

About the Editors 179



Out, Without a Doubt

by Craig J. Jaffe

Growing up, I always believed negative stereotypes about gays and lesbians. These stereotypes put down homosexuals and gave me an excuse to not educate myself about them. But when I got older, I learned that the only person I was dogging was myself. When I was twelve, I always acted macho and dogged girls and gays so my boys wouldn't think I was a "faggot." We never exchanged anything more than a handshake. I always thought if two guys exchanged something more than that, something was wrong.

I was extremely afraid of gay people. I believed all the lies I heard, such as that gays are not real men, they're sex maniacs, and they're all going to hell. Any time my friends and I saw a gay person, we'd make fun of him by walking "feminine."

But when I was thirteen, my feelings about sex began to change. For example, I once found myself looking at another guy and saying, "Damn, he's cute." When this happened, I tried telling myself it was wrong. I ignored my feelings, and they went away. At least I thought they did.

When I was fourteen, the feelings came back stronger. I thought it was just a phase, so I continued dating girls and putting down gays. At the same time, though, I was scoping out other men. I still believed there was no way I could be gay. After all, I didn't act like it.

"When I was thirteen, my feelings about sex began to change."

It wasn't until I moved into my group home that I had my eyes opened. I was now fifteen and still afraid of gays. When I first moved in I knew there were gays there, but I never expected to have one as my roommate. Because I had allowed myself to fall for myths about gays, I was extremely insecure about having a gay roommate.

I wouldn't change my clothes in front of Mike. I began to sleep in more than just my boxers, and I never walked around in just a towel. I was scared that Mike might try to hit on me or give me a surprise wake-up call in the middle of the night and make me "less of a man."



This insecurity didn't last too long. I began to get to know Mike for *who* he was, not *what* he was. I found out that we liked the same music and loved going clubbing. I didn't feel like I had to prove something to get his respect. But when Mike asked me if I was straight or gay, I lied. I told him I was straight but had a couple of gay friends.

The reality was that I was faking the funk. I knew I had feelings for guys, but I just didn't want to come out with that. I was afraid of being put down. I didn't want people to think I was a sissy, but at the same time I felt miserable. I was sacrificing being happy for my reputation.

After getting to know Mike better, I felt a little more comfortable with my sexuality. I didn't have to put up a front when I was with him. I grew jealous of Mike because he didn't care what people thought of him. His motto was, "You get what you give." I wanted to be like him—out, without a doubt. I didn't want to live my life in a closet.

As much as I wanted to come out and be free, I still had a hard time accepting the fact that I was gay. I couldn't picture myself sleeping with another guy. I had always believed that straight men had to act masculine, play sports, and lie about the women they had sex with. They didn't have sex with each other. If a guy was gay, then he had to be extremely flashy and flamboyant, walk feminine, and listen to Madonna all day.

“I was sacrificing being happy for my reputation.”

For some reason, Mike didn't seem to fit any of the stereotypes I had. He wasn't feminine, and he hated Madonna. Then it hit me. I realized I had prejudices about gays and lesbians and that, until I was able to free myself from them, I couldn't accept myself.

Mike really opened my eyes and mind. I saw that I didn't have to be feminine to come out of the closet. After about three weeks, I decided I was ready to unlock all the locks.

I called Mike into the bedroom and said there was something I had to tell him. I was a nervous wreck. I had sweaty palms, shaky knees, and a dry mouth. He saw how nervous I was and immediately closed the door and asked me what was the matter.

“Mike, I want to tell you something. Please do not tell anyone yet. Okay?”

YA NONFICTION/SELF-HELP FOR TEENS®

"Things always get better. Maybe not today, tomorrow, or even the next day, but they will. . . . There's always a way out of 'no way out.'"

—Lenny Jones

THE STRUGGLE TO BE STRONG

True stories by Teens About Overcoming Tough Times

Lenny grew up being teased and picked on.

Jamel lost his friends to marijuana.

Artiqua dated a boy of another race, despite her family's opposition.

Youniquie was abandoned by her mother.

Charlene raised her siblings because their mother was addicted to drugs.

Craig was gay and worried about coming out.

Max's best friend died of AIDS.

All of these teens had more than their share of troubles. And all found the strength to face them, live through them, and move forward with courage, confidence, and hope.

What's their secret? Resilience. And it's not a secret after all. Anyone can have it. You can have it.

As you read the true stories in this book, you'll learn what resilience is and where it comes from. You'll discover that you're not alone in having problems, doubts, fears, and hard days. And you'll begin to find tools that can help you build the skills and strengths you need to win your own battles.

Maybe your troubles aren't as bad as the ones you'll read about here. Maybe they're worse. Either way, this book may change your mind about a lot of things. Like how much you can take—and how strong you really are.

Al Desetta, M.A., is an editor at Youth Communication, a New York-based nonprofit organization that teaches writing, journalism, and leadership skills to inner-city teens.

Sybil Wolin, Ph.D., is a developmental psychologist and codirector of Project Resilience, a private initiative based in Washington, D.C., that trains professionals to help youth and adults overcome hardships.

Free Spirit is a
member of the



free spirit
PUBLISHING®



Helping kids
help themselves™
since 1983

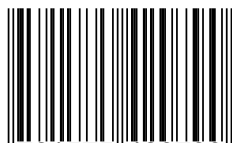
www.freespirit.com

ISBN-13 978-1-57542-079-0

ISBN-10 1-57542-079-1

\$14.95

51495



9 781575 420790