

GROUNDING WILDNESS

Break Free From Performing Your
Life and Start Living It

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Introduction

It's my favorite picture ever taken of me. I'm eight years old. It's 1988, and I *look* 1988. I'm wearing a head-to-toe pastel pink sweatsuit adorned with a large red satin heart across the chest. My naturally stick-straight brown hair is growing out a perm, creating uneven waves across my bangs and shoulder-length locks. My mom had recently decided I would be more comfortable if I didn't have to tuck my hair behind my ears to keep it from getting in my face, so the sides of my growing-out perm are shaved off and I'm sporting a *mullet*.

I'm looking directly at the camera, my blue eyes shining at the lens. I have a calm yet slightly audacious smile on my face. My arm is stretched out to the camera,

and I'm holding a *live snake*.

This is no minuscule garter snake! Its camouflage-checked body winds through the air three or four feet in front of me. My right hand grips the snake lightly, just below its head, while its tail wraps around my left hand as an anchor.

I look at this little girl and see someone who knows exactly who she is. She's confident, bold, and relaxed. There's no distance between who she is on the inside and the person she's presenting to the world. She has nothing to hide, cover up, or shove down. She's taking up the full space of who she is.

This little girl *is* me. I'm the girl, now a woman, who looks straight at the camera with a smile on her face while holding a live snake. That's me.

I lost her for a long time.

Maybe lost is too strong of a word. It's more like she got buried under an avalanche of rules that told me to hold my breath and tuck myself in.

These rules commanded me to quiet the boldness of my voice and dampen the fire in my belly. They made it clear that I should be ashamed of the larger body I inhabited throughout my teen and young adult years. They guided me to shove down the big emotions I felt, put a smile on my face, and keep going. They ordered me to prove my worth through productivity, achievement, likability, and a million other forms of external validation.

Then I woke up.

I started to break the rules.

That journey began with severing the ties between

my worth and achievement. My first book, *An Overachiever's Guide to Breaking the Rules: How to Let Go of Perfect and Live Your Truth*, details the story of this initial awakening. For the first time, I saw clearly all the messages, stories, and rules I'd been handed that had told me I *always* had to work harder and do more—and I realized I could choose to let go of those rules.

These realizations were HUGE. It's not an exaggeration to say they changed my life.

Little did I know that was just the beginning. Another level of realizations and rule-breaking was on the horizon and about to split open my entire world.

I was about to become a woman living in *grounded wildness*.

Grounded wildness is the wholeness you rediscover when you break the rules that have broken you—and the inevitable freedom that follows. You stand wild in your freedom because you are grounded in your worth. You get to stop *performing* your life and start *living* it.

My journey into grounded wildness has been a pilgrimage to break away from the suffocating rules that kept me small and tight and to reclaim my freedom. It's a kind of freedom that doesn't require achievement, validation, or compliance, but rather lives deep inside me. Inside all of us.

This freedom allows me to feel every emotion I'm experiencing, from the joy of laughing with total abandon to an overflowing river of grief. It lets me get on stage and say the thing that needs to be said, rather than worrying if I'm pushing too hard or upsetting the status

quo too much. It lets me go on a date without feeling like I have to perform and prove that I'm fun and desirable. It allows me to be my own guide, rather than looking toward the rules to tell me how I should look, speak, show up, and generally live my life.

Grounded wildness has opened the door for the little girl holding the snake to come back to life. Only now, that little girl has grown up. She's a truer version of herself because she's broken through the rules handed to her and made up her own rules for life. She knows she is whole, complete, and even *radiant* without having to do anything at all. No proving, pleasing, or perfecting needed.

I want this for you as well.

Parts of this book will make you feel happy and light. Other parts will make you uncomfortable. You'll recognize the rules that have kept you performing and be reminded of your own wildness. You might cry. You'll probably laugh. Questions will arise. You'll have new realizations.

I encourage you to stay awake for it all. To feel everything you're feeling without judgment. When something gets uncomfortable, sit with the discomfort and listen for the messages it's sending you. When something gives you joy, grant yourself full permission to wrap yourself in that joy and feel

it in your soul. This is all part of living in grounded wildness.¹

This book is broken into four parts. The first three detail my journey from losing my young wildness through many years of relentless performing, and finally to the breaks that led me to escape the rules, rediscover myself, and move into the freedom of grounded wildness. As you read my story, you'll be prompted to reflect on your journey. I invite you to spend time on these exercises. This book isn't about me. It's about you. Only you can uncover your story and reclaim your freedom.

The fourth and final part is called "Getting Grounded and Wild." It outlines practices to guide you toward grounded wildness—and stay there. You'll learn how to create space for yourself, feel your feelings, follow your aliveness, trust your knowing, let your body lead, claim yourself, and take up space. You'll also discover how to deal with the people who don't get it (or who straight-up disapprove) and find your grounded wildness community of people who *do*.

Even though I present practices for you to try, this isn't a precise how-to book—and that's on purpose. I can't tell you exactly how grounded wildness looks and feels for you. I can't give you a ten-point process to check off that will

1 If it ever feels like too much, seek out a therapist, counselor, or other professional. This book wouldn't have been possible without the therapist I worked with for six months. She guided me through the breakdown that led to grounded wildness. You'll read more about this experience in part two, The Break.

guarantee your “success.” You can’t hack your way into your own freedom.

Your path to grounded wildness is a continual journey. I regularly discover new rules I had no idea were living inside me. Old ones also occasionally pop up and require me to slow down, reconnect to myself, and consciously let them go again.

And yet, I’m experiencing a freedom I didn’t know was possible a few years ago. I feel that freedom coursing through my veins, enlivening my body, heart, mind, and soul. I’ve stopped hiding in the shadows of myself and stepped into the light.

You can, too.

Let’s get started.