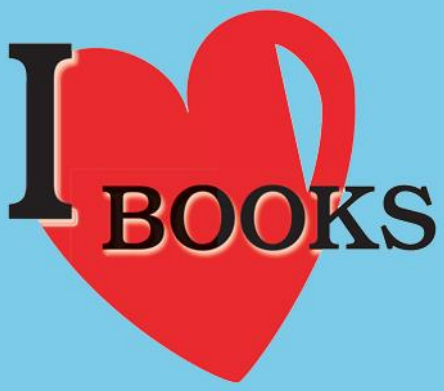


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Opening extract from

Open: A Toolkit for How Magic and Messed Up Life Can Be

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I am brave
I am brash
I am bold
I am wild
I love to cuddle
I am loud . . . but
I am vulnerable
I love to smooch
I am serene
I am bored
BUT ALWAYS EXCITED
I am goofy
I am beautiful
Why do I find it so hard to write that?
I am deeply saddened
but at the same time so happy
I LOVE my life and I love the world
I sometimes don't like myself though
I am not perfect
I'm sometimes tired
I am always raring to go

I am as deep as an old well
I am shallow like a lame puddle
I am strange
which means I am normal
I am not preaching
I am a friend
with an OPEN heart

I am me.

WELCOME

Welcome to *Open: A Toolkit for How Magic and Messed Up Life Can Be*.

This book is here to be your guide in times of need. Keep it on your shelf and go to specific chapters during those moments in life that mess with your head, or leaf through and devour it cover to cover. By opening this book you have become part of #TeamOpen, and part of the movement for open hearts and minds. There is no one that this book isn't for.

During years of presenting, and more recently with *The Surgery* on Radio 1, I've encountered a huge variety of people who are dealing with lots of different things in their own ways. My own life hasn't always been easy, and whilst I've dealt with some of the stuff that comes up in this book, I'm not an expert in everything – all I can do is communicate openly about what I've been through and be a friend. I've consulted lots of people who are experts in the issues covered, though – along with a list of people and organizations to speak to if you need more information on anything.

This book covers some tough stuff, but there's nothing you wouldn't find in the storyline of a popular soap opera, and definitely NOTHING you wouldn't find within a four-second Google search. *Open* is about real life and everything that comes with it.

This book isn't all about me, it's also about you and all the other incredibly clever, brutally honest, brave and awesomely inspiring voices woven within its pages. This book is yours and I want you to personalize it in any way you see fit; to embellish it and make your own mark on the pages. There are no rules. Douse it in gorgeous gold pen, doodle across it with a blunt pencil or a defiant marker pen, or cover it in magical stickers – and whatever your approach, feel free to respond to however the words make you feel.

Just  YOU




YOUR HEART

YOUR HEART

is precious. It is AWESOME. Not only does it pump blood around your body to keep you alive, but it is the root of your deepest emotions.

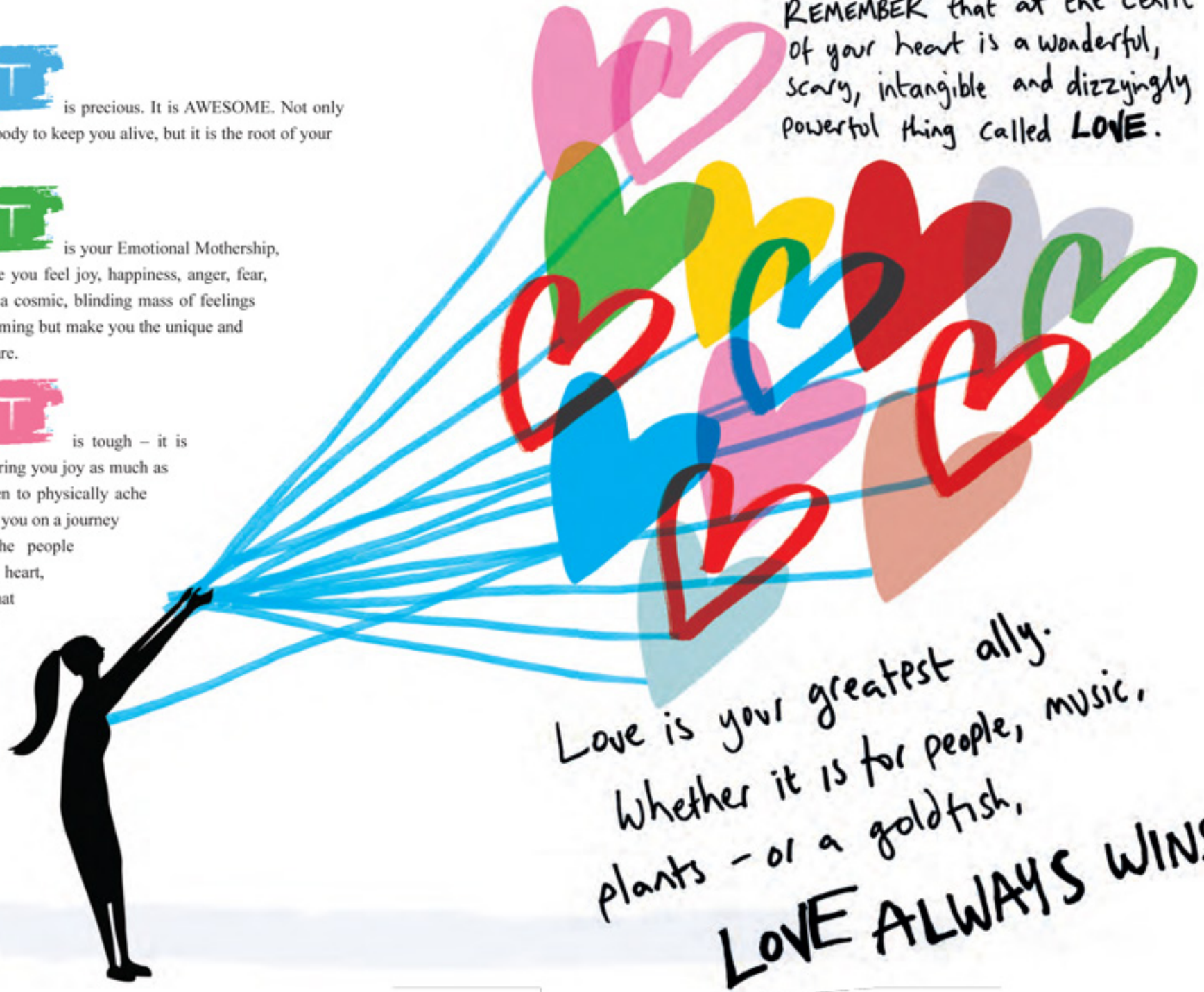
YOUR HEART

is your Emotional Mothership, your inner hub – the place where you feel joy, happiness, anger, fear, sadness, heartbreak, confusion – a cosmic, blinding mass of feelings that can sometimes feel overwhelming but make you the unique and incredible human being that you are.

YOUR HEART

is tough – it is a warrior – it will heal you and bring you joy as much as it will cause you to hurt and even to physically ache sometimes. Right now I'm taking you on a journey through your heart, through the people and situations that touch your heart, that bump it along the way, that soothe it and that make it want to burst with emotions.

REMEMBER that at the centre of your heart is a wonderful, scary, intangible and dizzyingly powerful thing called **LOVE**.



Love is your greatest ally. Whether it is for people, music, plants – or a goldfish, **LOVE ALWAYS WINS.**

FAMILY



Families are like balls made up of elastic bands, wrapped and bound and wound around each other, linked by similarities and connections. We are linked to others, but individuals too. The truth is that families aren't perfect, ever. More often than not, families are far from 'conventional'. But these peeps, the ones who brought us into the world, help form who we are and who we will go on to be.

Remember there is no such thing as a 'normal' family.

Let's kick off with PARENTS. When it comes to parents, we love to label them, don't we? There are step-parents, divorced parents, single parents, adopted parents, foster parents, estranged parents, good parents, bad parents, boring parents, uptight parents, possessive parents, depressed parents, parents that argue, so-in-love-it-grosses-us-out-cos-we-hear-them-having-sex-sometimes parents, parents-we-never-see-for-some-reason-like-'they-are-always-at-work' parents, parents who are hard to please, parents who have passed away, parents we miss so much it makes our eyes sting at the thought of them.

Then there are those beings (more like aliens) we call siblings: BROTHERS and SISTERS. When it comes to brothers and sisters, the labels and emotive descriptions come thick and fast out of the box again: step-siblings, siblings you get on really well with, siblings you hate, siblings you envy, competitive siblings, siblings you have nothing to say to, siblings you've never met, half-brothers or half-sisters.

Or of course you might be an ONLY CHILD, or maybe you feel like an only child because your sibling or siblings are a lot older or younger than you and you didn't grow up with them.

IT'S COMPLICATED...

Hand in the air if you can identify with one or more of these families? Millions of us have higgledy-piggledy, eclectic family trees. Some of us have detailed horror stories and fabulous family-specific tales that drip from the leaves too. I do, and so do most of the people I know. Even if we find our personal family patchwork generally OK, at some point EVERYONE FINDS THEIR FAMILY EMBARRASSING.
No one – and I repeat NO ONE – escapes that.

Chatting to your 'rents

When the poo hits the fan, hopefully you can talk to your mum or dad, or your foster parent, or your guardian – whoever looks after you – about your worries and fears. If you don't feel like you have someone who fits that description, then find someone who is older than you, wiser than you, that you trust and who gives good advice. Even if that person is on the end of a phone. These people do exist, I promise. A teacher, a doctor or someone from a qualified organization or support network – if life is getting tough, they'll help you start to figure out what is puzzling you or bringing you down. Even if they can't perform perfect wizardry and magic answers out of the air, they will be able to point you in the right direction.

A problem shared can be a problem halved.

College / university

Research what help is available to you here, even if you're not feeling like you need help right now – it's good to know that it's there for you. Most colleges and universities provide free and confidential in-house counselling services, with professionally qualified counsellors and access to specific external advice.

Teacher / School

Schools are set up and ready to hear from their students, whether it's about exam pressure or problems at home.

Your Workplace

Many companies have an HR department. The HR stands for Human Resources and is designed to protect the well-being of the employee, especially if it is an issue relating to the workplace itself. Some HR departments are better than others (they aren't always the answer). But it's worth researching yours specifically and knowing your rights within your place of work. Ask around and work out what's in place to protect and look after you.

A mate's mum

Sometimes borrowing someone else's mum is pretty helpful. They can offer an unbiased perspective as well as having the mum qualities you need.

Your GP / doctor

If you break your arm, you go to the doctor. If you are feeling stressed, anxious and filled with heartache because of it, your doctor may be able to help with this too.

When your parents are being hot-headed monsters and saying **no** to something . . .

When you feel that parents are acting all unapproachable and saying no to something you want to do, remember that most of them instinctively want to protect you, feed you and get you educated and equipped. They want to prepare you for the big wide world. They literally can't help it. Imagine if you could see your face in someone smaller than you, and that you've been through life's highs and lows, and all you want more than anything in the whole wide world is for the face of the person smaller than you to be smiling and oozing joy. You'd WRESTLE A DINOSAUR to protect them.

Even though families can make us roar like no other and prod our emotional pressure points in a way that only they can, I want you to know that your family is only doing its job, which is to make you generally feel loved and safe. If you are reading this with a family member nearby, go give them a cuddle. Or do it next time you see them. Then answer this:

Did it make you glow and feel warm inside?

YES ☐ **NO** ☐

If the answer is YES to feeling warm and glowing from the inside from hugging at least one of your family members, then this a good sign – remember this next time you feel like they are against you!

If the answer is NO and you are not getting on with any of your family, you are lacking their presence in any way, you feel truly alone or in your gut you are very uncomfortable with something that's going on in your family at the moment – please read on.

DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES

There is a difference between a MESSY family and a family that makes you feel unsafe or uncared for. Hopefully you have someone in your family who is strong and looks out for you – but issues such as alcoholism, addiction, depression, divorce, money worries or unemployment can rock your parents and make it difficult for them to cope. Please remember it is not your job to take on their problems, but there are people you can talk to about how to cope with your own feelings.

Please ask yourself these three things:

1) **Is it affecting your everyday life?** ☐
2) **Are you scared in any way?** ☐
3) **Would you like some extra help with this situation?** ☐

If you ticked any of the above, please tell someone in authority that you are feeling this way and why. I REPEAT: speak to a teacher, or your GP, if that seems more appropriate, or head to the back of this book for a list of organizations that are expert in helping with specific issues, no matter how hard or scary they seem. You are NOT alone.