

give it a go girl!



by SARAH CALLEJA
with Nina Calleja



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Graffiti – by Anoka 08

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little body-big head

Being too popular in year 7 felt like a real burden to me. I had to think on my feet all the time about what I was doing and saying to protect my image and position.

I was stuck between being cool and picking on the losers or being one of the losers and being picked on by the cool girls – not much of a choice!

I felt guilty for being so popular and sometimes I felt like I had so much more in common with the losers. I used to envy the losers for being able to be themselves and not have to be in a group of girls that look and talk and act in only one way to always prove you had 'it'.

There was one girl Emma who could have been one of the popular girls but she refused to because she wanted to do her own thing. She made me really mad because she was doing what I didn't have the guts to do. So, I picked on her and the other girls helped me – they knew where I was coming from.

I held out for nearly the whole of year 7.

That Emma wore me down. Emma became involved in the school play and really proved her worth as an actress. Everyone was really impressed and she continued to ignore our attempts at bullying her. She actually didn't seem to care what we said or did. She just stayed busy doing her own thing.

In the end, I wanted to be like her more than the fake me I'd become, so I gave up my 'cool' friends and joined Emma. We became inseparable friends after that and I was finally able to relax and enjoy school.

Ariana 16 years old



**To the girls reading
this book Ariana
would recommend:
Find an opportunity
to be yourself. Look
to see what others
are doing and see
if it works for you.
Don't stop trying and
eventually you'll find
something that fits.**

seeing red

I felt big and important going into year 7. My older sister was at the school and I felt like I knew pretty much what was going on. I'm pretty confident and make friends easily so I wasn't freaking out at all. The first few days were pretty much as I had expected but I hadn't counted on being so tired. It was a hot summer and the classrooms weren't air-conditioned. By the end of the week everyone was complaining about the heat and I didn't realise that I was getting my period for the first time.

It was Friday afternoon and we were all pretty cranky including the teachers. I thought I was sweating so much that I'd wet my seat. I stood up to look and I saw RED. It was blood!

I realised the blood had soaked through my dress and onto the seat. My mother had prepared me so I understood that I had just started my period but she hadn't prepared me for this!

I hadn't had a chance yet to make any real friends. For the first time in my life I felt alone and really embarrassed. I had to think fast and so I did what I'm good at and opened my big mouth. I told the three girls next to me and we formed a plan. They all got up and went behind me. I tied my jumper around my waist and behind my back to hide my dress as best I could. They formed a barrier behind me, pushed my chair in after I got up and walked me to sick bay.

It's funny how close you get to people who help you through a bad experience. They were the first friendships I made and they were pretty special.

Sara-Marie 13 years old

To the girls reading this book Sara-Marie would recommend:

Girls are good at supporting each other through really personal problems so don't be scared to open your mouth and ask.

diving in off the deep end

My introduction to what kind of disaster year 7 was going to be like for me was on the first day. Towards the end of the day we were taken to the swimming pool and asked to change into our bathers... argh!! I'm a very private person and I felt uncomfortable undressing in front of girls I didn't know.

We were then expected to dive into the pool to be assessed for the upcoming swimming sports. On the starting block I froze with terror and started hyperventilating even though I knew I could dive. I felt so humiliated but somehow worked up enough courage to ask the teacher if I could start in the pool. She agreed but I still couldn't make myself swim the lap and I had to get out – devastated! I felt everyone had noticed and that I looked stupid.

Some girls had come up from the junior school in their friendship groups, they were laughing with each other and seemed to be enjoying their swim, which made me feel even more left out. I had no one to share my stuff with and I felt so lonely.

After that I decided I wasn't very good at sport (although I did ballet for 5 years) so I thought that meant I wasn't 'cool'. Instead I focused on schoolwork and wound up winning academic awards. The teachers really respected me, which made me feel important. Out of school, I hung with my old primary school friends because I seemed to have more in common with them and I felt like I belonged.

I didn't want to give up on making friends at school so I joined the extra-curricular activities like music and dance. I felt better about myself when I was doing these activities because I was good at them and I met and made friends there. We weren't best friends but I had someone to hang with and share with and that made me feel a hell of a lot better about school. By the end of year 7, I guess I felt like I'd finally jumped off the deep end and made my swim.

Abigail 16 years old

To the girls reading this book Abigail would recommend:

Don't be put off by a bad start... throw yourself off the deep end!

Nina's story

Four years ago my mother, a psychologist/sex therapist (oh the reactions, very amusing) decided to write a book with me. The inspiration behind this sudden revelation was not all that unusual. I, a new student at a huge school, was miserable, whereas I had been perfectly happy at my old primary school. At my new school I had a few friends and people I could hang around with so I didn't appear alone, but I wasn't happy.

The writing of the book itself didn't really help me all that much. All I really did was assist my mum, tell her whether particular things were relevant and the like. There was no guiding beacon to lead me out of the dark ages of my childhood, bearing me forth as a well-adjusted young teen with multiple strong friendships and a good rapport amongst my peers. No, for a good amount of time I remained rather miserable.

My particular brand of unhappiness was due to me not making any real connections with people and not really fitting into any groups. I didn't fail to make friends because of any social disability on my part, nor did I consider myself a boring or introverted person, I just wasn't used to that situation of learning to fit in and I didn't fare too well. Most of the time I couldn't contribute to a conversation because I didn't think anyone would care what I had to say. I thought they would judge me, and that people would simply not care, or that they wouldn't want to listen. I had a few people I clung to for support but I never bonded to them, I just didn't want to be alone.

Personally, the worst part for me was being alone at lunchtime. I consider it a particularly nasty brand of loneliness when you have no-one to eat with. So I took to either not eating, walking around with my food, or to hiding in a non-circumspect place in the school where no-one would notice that I was alone.

It took me until year 9, my third year at the new school, before I learnt some of the defining things about myself that allow me to be much happier today. These revelations were mostly due to a program for year 9 students where a group of us from the three city campuses of the school went to a country campus in the town of Clunes for a term. We lived together, did everything together, and learnt a lot about ourselves (excuse my being a bit mushy, but I really did learn a lot). After Clunes, without going into any ridiculous detail about what happened, I learnt that in order to have an interesting conversation with someone I had to actually both care about what I was saying before

it came out, and to consider it worthy of being heard. In other words, I had learnt that I wasn't just another person, I was my own person and I was just as important as any of my peers. It sounds like a ridiculous conclusion to come to, being such a fundamental one, yet it's those things that people seem to forget.

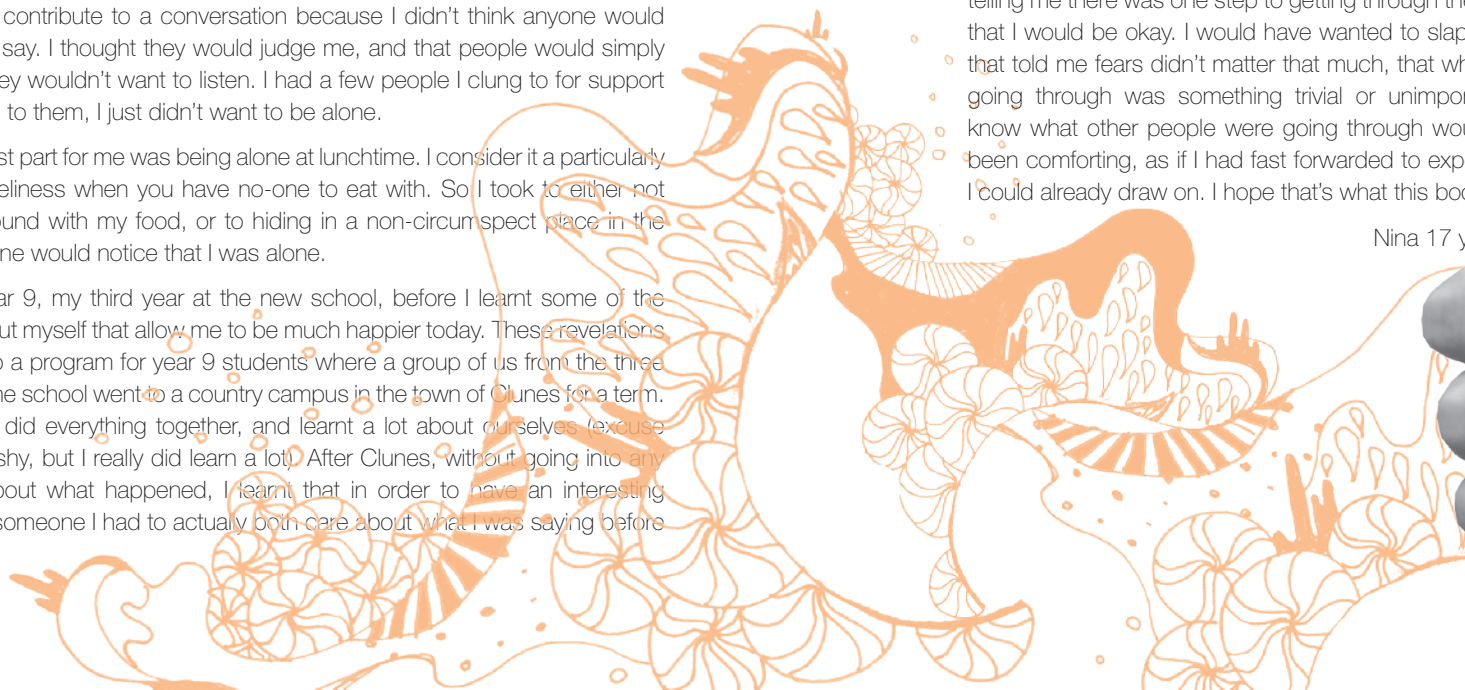
I consider Clunes something very close to my heart, and I consider myself very fortunate for having had experienced it. Yet at the same time, I would have come to those realisations eventually. Some people, like me, have a defining moment. Some don't. Upon reading this, one might think 'well that's all well and good for her, she had Clunes, but what about me who only has normal school and normal life'. I feel that nothing and no-one is normal. There will be something strange and awkward happening for everyone. There will be opportunities to change and grow as I did at Clunes. Look for those opportunities and don't let them slip away.

I'm not going to tell anyone the things that get crammed down our throats constantly about 'making friends'. Those things like; be yourself, be strong, be happy, have confidence. One cannot simply 'have' any of those things. And how on earth are 13 year old girls supposed to be true to ourselves when we don't even quite know who we are yet? So much was happening in year 7 and I felt a tad overwhelmed. The thing is, it doesn't change all that much. I'm in year 11 now and I still feel daunted quite often, I feel insecure and scared, but everyone does.

I love school now. If I never felt stupid or scared I would probably be arrogant and annoying. What I'm trying to say is I draw on my earlier experiences constantly for strength and to help other people.

When I was in year 7, I didn't want some older people telling me there was one step to getting through the year or that I would be okay. I would have wanted to slap anyone that told me fears didn't matter that much, that what I was going through was something trivial or unimportant. To know what other people were going through would have been comforting, as if I had fast forwarded to experiences I could already draw on. I hope that's what this book is for.

Nina 17 years old



It's a year seven thing

from junior to secondary school

The girls who wrote their real stories and created artwork in this book wanted to share with you some of the wisdom that came from their experiences:

You are not alone - so don't be afraid to reach out to people you trust who have 'been there' before you.

It's normal to feel scared, confused, excited and happy - sometimes all in the same day!

To have a friend and to be a friend is really empowering.

You will stuff-up and it's ok to stuff up - it's what you learn from it that counts!

To survive and thrive in year seven, they recommended **GIVING IT A GO GIRL** - they did and so can you!

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