

LIVING THE SWEET LIFE AT HOME

99 THOUGHTS
ON RAISING YOUR PARENTS

*Liesel and Max Oestreicher
with Mark Oestreicher*



simply for students



99 Thoughts on Raising Your Parents

Living the Sweet Life at Home

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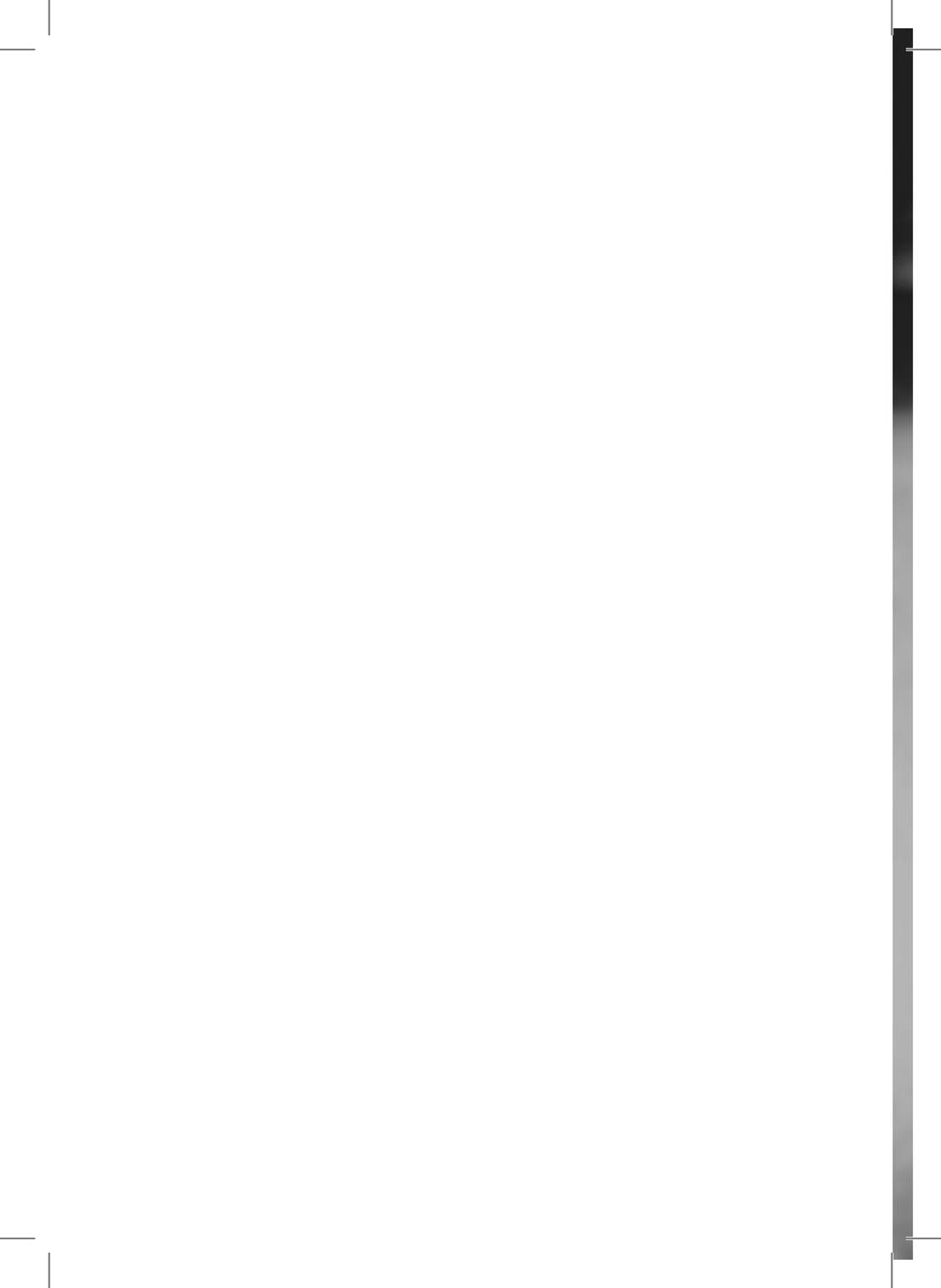
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DEDICATION

For our mom, Jeannie Oestreicher, who taught
us how to love and be loved.



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START HERE

Hi. We're Liesl (18) and Max (14), and we're siblings. We are not made up. We're real teenagers, and we really wrote this book (with a little help from our dad).

You should know this: We're not perfect kids. Not at all.

There are other teenagers (we see them in our church youth groups) who seem more perfect; they seem like the kinds of sons and daughters Christian parents would choose if we were all picked out at a store. Instead, we're two kids who have a good relationship with our parents *and* who aren't perfect. We get in trouble, fight with our parents (and each other), and frustrate our teachers from time to time. In fact, both of us have been sent home from school at one point or another. In other words: We're normal teenagers, and our not-perfect parents are normal, too.

But maybe we're not as normal in this way: We have a really great relationship with our

parents. We love them, and they love us. We trust them (most of the time, at least), and they try really, really hard to support us and give us freedom and encouragement. Not that we don't go ballistic with each other from time to time—but even when we do, we're usually pretty good at patching things up.

So our hope is that we can give you a few thoughts (99 of 'em, to be exact) from the perspective of *average* teenagers who have a *better than average* relationship with their parents.

A little more about each of us:

Max

As I write this, I'm in eighth grade, and like most eighth-graders, I'm ready to be out of middle school. I love music; ska, indie-rock, and blues are my favorite genres. I buy as much music as I can afford.

I play drums in the middle school worship band at my church; drums are my main

instrument, but I also play ukulele, mandolin, and I'm trying to buy a musical saw (yeah, I like weird instruments). I also drum in a band with two of my friends. We were called Mumbler, but just changed our name to Army of Dave because there's another Mumbler on iTunes® (not that we're on iTunes yet).

I have a slight obsession with bacon. I have tried bacon mints, bacon jelly beans, and bacon soda. I give bacon-related gifts to all my friends for their birthdays. I even have a wallet that looks like it's made out of bacon.

I like pranks. Stink bombs, fake blood, electric shock pens, and stuff set overnight in Jell-O®. My parents are really tired of the smell of stink bombs.

Lies!

As I write this, I will graduate from high school in 9 weeks, 3 days, 3 hours, and 27 minutes. In my opinion, that's way too long. Right after I graduate, I'll work for the summer at an awesome wilderness camp.

Then, next school year, I'm going on a nine-month gap-year trip with a friend. We'll be social and agricultural volunteers in the U.K. and India. When I return, I'll head off to college, in a program that allows me to create my own major. I expect to combine physics or math with music and religious studies.

Like my brother, I'm really into music. My main instrument is viola, but in my church's high school worship band, I play bass guitar and keyboard. I'm also interested in environmentalism, which I express through leading the Planet Team for the high school ministry at my church. Our team collects recyclables to raise money for our sponsor children around the world.

My friends call me a modern-day hippie. I've been a vegetarian for over five years, I have dreadlocks, and I like to sit barefoot at the park, making hemp bracelets and playing acoustic guitar while eating granola. I'm not joking; laugh if you must.

A few more things need to be said before we jump in...

First, with a book this short and in this format (99 thoughts, not a ton of depth on any one subject), we didn't really feel like we had a place to address the super hard stuff that some of you (and some of our friends) have to face. We haven't written about abuse, or neglect, or living with an alcoholic, or any one of dozens of other really difficult situations teenagers find themselves in.

Not including this stuff shouldn't imply that it doesn't matter. Really, it's just the opposite: That stuff matters so much that we didn't want to minimize it by offering two sentences of advice.

If you're in a tough situation like that, please take the risk to find an adult to talk to. Hey, like we said, each of us has a good relationship with our parents, and we've both still found it really important and helpful to talk to other adults at times about problems we're having. We hope you have a youth group

leader or someone who's the obvious choice. If you don't have an obvious choice of someone to talk to, pray about who that might be. Look for a safe adult in your church, in your school, or in your neighborhood.

Another thing: Reading over these 99 thoughts, you might sometimes think things are rosier in our family than they are. Actually, things are pretty good at this moment, but they aren't always and haven't always been.

We want to give you a general suggestion we've found to be true: You might go through periods of time—days, weeks, months, even years—when you don't connect well with your parents. You might experience entire seasons where you hardly talk, or where things always seem tense. You might—as we have (Liesl particularly)—feel like there are long periods of time when every conversation leads to disagreement or fighting. Here's what we've learned: Even though it might not feel like it, you have to choose to believe that your parents love you. Even when you're in the lousiest periods of stress and ugliness, when

you feel like they totally don't understand you and are being completely unreasonable, hold on to the base truth that their motivation is mostly still trying to figure out what's best for you.

If you can believe that—that they love you and want the best for you—you can weather some of the difficult seasons that most teenagers experience with their parents. At least that's been really helpful for us.

Finally, if you just read these 99 thoughts, you might conclude that we assume every teenager lives with his or her original birth parents. We happen to, but we know you might not. Tons of our friends from church and school don't live with both of their birth parents, and we've seen all kinds of variations: single parents, stepparents, adoptive parents, foster parents, grandparents, or other family members raising teenagers.

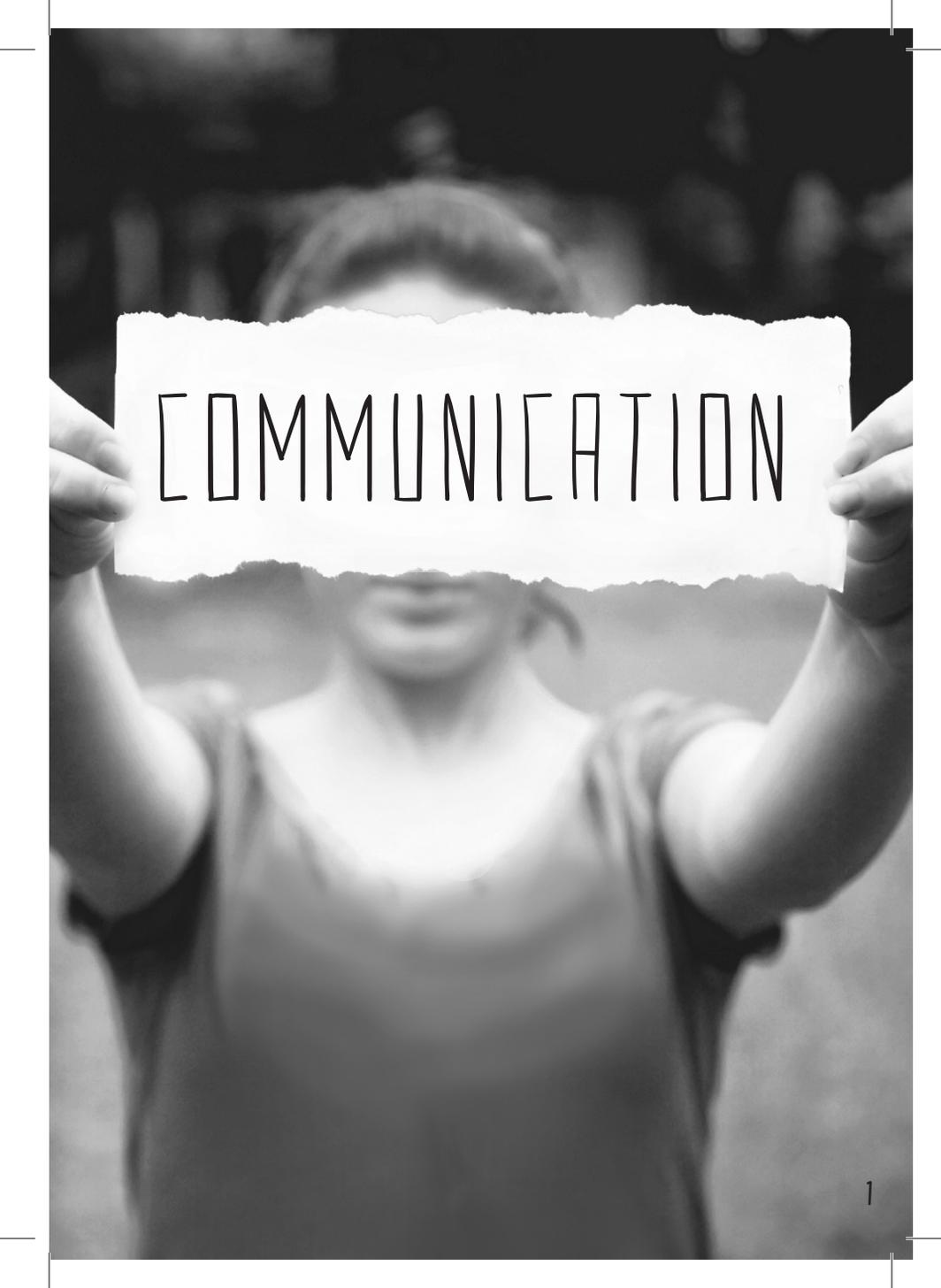
When you read the word *parents* in this book, just translate it into your reality. Swap it out, in your mind, for whatever situation you're in,

with the adult or adults in your home who are responsible for you.

One more thing: You'll see that at the end of each chapter, we've included a "Stupid Thought." Please know that these are completely sarcastic! Do *not* read them as actual advice, or things will get ugly.

OK, that's about it for now. Let's get on to the 99 thoughts. Thanks for joining us. Keep your hands and feet inside the vehicle, and enjoy the ride!

Liesl and Max

A black and white photograph of a person holding a piece of torn paper with the word "COMMUNICATION" written on it. The person's face is partially obscured by the paper, and their hands are visible holding the edges. The background is blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting. The word "COMMUNICATION" is written in a simple, outlined, sans-serif font.

COMMUNICATION



01 TALK IT UP.

You can't have a healthy relationship with your parents if you don't talk to them. Talk about what's going on in your life, how school's going, what's going on in the lives of your friends, and all kinds of other stuff. Sometimes our family will all sit down at the dinner table and share the highs and lows of our day. It gives us a way to talk about stuff we might otherwise forget to mention.

02 LISTEN UP.

Talking is great, but you also have to listen. Ask your parents how their day went. Then listen, and engage with what they say.

03 DON'T IGNORE EMOTIONS.

Emotions are people, too, and no one likes to be ignored (we're kidding, of course, about

the first part of that sentence). In order to have successful communication, it's very important to keep your emotions and your parents' emotions in mind.

When I (Liesl) was learning how to drive, my parents and I experienced *lots* of emotions. I was very confident and didn't want to be told I'd done something wrong. On the other hand, my parents were stressing every time I got behind the wheel. It was important for me to keep these elevated emotions in mind when my parents were talking to me about driving skills. If I wasn't careful, I would end up getting defensive, and that would stress them out even more.

04 DON'T ASSUME YOUR PARENTS KNOW THINGS.

Parents aren't mind readers, even if you're afraid they are sometimes. Having them be surprised by something you *thought* they knew, but didn't, can be a frustrating

experience for them. So keep them in the know, whether it's your schedule, your reasoning for choices, or your feelings.

05 DON'T ASSUME YOUR PARENTS *DON'T KNOW THINGS.*

Just as the previous assumption can be harmful to great communication, the opposite assumption is also true! But this one isn't so much about constantly bombarding them with all your brilliant insights and ways you can fix them; it's more about not assuming they're stupid.

Sure, most parents can seem completely clueless at times (they are, after all, living in a very different world than we are!)—but that doesn't mean they're idiots.