

SHINE and Be the Star You Are!®

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Valleys and mountains lie silent in the early hours, swallowed in a sea of shadows. The door of the farmhouse whispers open; it shuts as softly. The small girl goes about her morning chores, feet bare by choice, padding softly on the grass and dirt, checking on the chickens and the sheep and the tractor, thinking of the fruit she will pick later that day. And all the while a rim of light grows against the horizon, gathering first in the low gaps between hills, rising till it overflows, until finally it floods higher and washes the sky with day. Just then, she pauses for a moment and turns her head towards the sun. And her bright eyes grow wide with eagerness as she smiles and kneels to tend her garden.

“Say yes to life,” is the recipe for success that has always guided Cynthia Brian, a farm girl turned New York Times best-selling author and television/radio personality. Born in Napa Valley in Northern California as the eldest of five children, this “Renaissance woman of the new millennium” has dedicated herself to making waves of change in pursuit of her lifelong mission of serving others and globally enhancing the quality of life for all people. “Recognizing . . . our differences are our greatest strengths,” says Brian.

True to her dogma, she has recently written *Be the Star You Are! for Teens*, a novel concerning teen empowerment in a century when young people are torn between parental rules and restrictions and cultural messages about beauty, wealth, sexuality, and other critical issues.

In many schools and universities, students understand what it means to be pushed to the limits of their abilities. “Young people are especially pressured to live up to their parents’ expectations and society’s expectations,” says Brian. In the midst of a struggle to achieve perfect scores and excel in every subject, we become one-sided and lose our abilities to be well-rounded individuals. Instead of perfection, Brian praises an ideology based on accentuating the positives in life. “My philosophy,” she says, “has always been to strive for excellence. There *is* no perfection. And if we live by that motto, we are going to be comfortable with ourselves.”

Be the Star You Are! for Teens encourages young people to bring out their inner light and explore creative expression while remaining true to themselves. The collection of stories, intentionally divided into very short chapters that are easy to read in only a few minutes, are all true tales told from the hearts of teens discovering the gifts of acceptance, communication, faith, healing, love, understanding, and many others.

In compiling the collection of tales, Cynthia Brian had to choose from many stories submitted by contributors. The ones that ultimately made it into the book were all very different, although they shared one common theme. “[Each] story has some kind of positive outcome or a lesson or an exercise [we] can learn from,” she says, something that is particularly important in a century when young people are too often pressured to perform beyond their immediate means.

Constant failure can lead teens to depression and to abandoning their goals and dreams. “Many people live their lives with a negative viewpoint . . . [and] believe that nothing good will

ever happen to [them],” Brian notes. Instead, she hopes to teach her readers to live their lives with the belief that no dream is unattainable. “*Everything* is possible,” she reminds us. “If we are willing to work hard enough and hang in there long enough, we can achieve anything we want in life.”

In addition, many teens struggle with their perceptions of a culture that anticipates nothing short of perfection. *Be the Star You Are! for Teens* seeks to challenge that notion. After all, Brian believes, although it is important to always do your best, no one is perfect. “I am very imperfect. I make tons of mistakes,” she says with a laugh, adding, “I say failure is fertilizer. I’m a gardener. I put failures on the compost pile and use them as lessons. Everything in life is a lesson as well as a blessing.”

In learning from our mistakes lies the key insight of Cynthia Brian’s novel. As we journey throughout our lives, we will be faced with risks. If we never dare go out on the limb, we will never discover the true meaning of who we are. “If we take no risks, we will never gain anything,” Brian encourages. “Are we going to fall flat on our faces? Are we going to embarrass ourselves? Are we going to make mistakes? Yes, yes, yes! But the more mistakes [we] make, the more successful we will be.”

Young people will always be encouraged to reach greater heights. But the real challenge in today’s century is striking a balance between expectations and one’s true self. “The important message for students is to find your passion, to find your purpose,” Cynthia Brian fondly shares. “When you find your passion and you find your purpose, you find your life. And the way you find that life is by being the star you are. Dig deep into your heart and your soul. Discover what makes you tick. And don’t be afraid to go out there and be different because being different is being a superstar. That’s what makes us shine.”