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Growing up, I always used to say to my mum that it scared me – the idea of not making the most of my life. I remember having this conversation with her so many times: I'd tell her how I was fearful of just growing old, sitting in my rocking chair and regretting that I'd not done more. I wanted to be able to look back and tell my grandkids, 'I did things that were completely out of the ordinary. I did crazy, big things.'

Now, don't get me wrong, now that I'm older, I know just how there is nothing at all wrong with an 'ordinary' life – I know a lot of people would love a life that could be called that! And in many ways it's the everyday parts of my life – the times when I'm at home, curled up on the sofa in front of a film – that make me the happiest today. But, looking back, that was my way of expressing as a kid that I wanted to live a life that *I* wanted – that I wanted to create my own path.

And that desire has shaped so many of my choices. For better or worse, I have always been drawn to doing the unexpected thing: whether that was entering pageants, going to fashion school in London, even having my lips done at a young age (more on how I

feel about *that* later) and, last but not least, starting to build a career on social media. I've always felt that impulse to do more, achieve more, experience more. I never wanted to do just what other people expected for me – and now I'm living a life I still can't believe. But what you see online can only tell half the story ...

In this book, for the first time, I want to share it all with you, revealing the highs, lows and everything in between, online and off. From getting my start on social media and becoming an influencer, to finding myself on *that* island, building a business empire and juggling work and love, all in the glare of the spotlight. I'll tell you what's really gone on, how I've felt and the lessons I've learned – and am still learning!

At 23, I'm definitely a work in progress, and I want to share with you all I've gone through in my life up to this point. I'll reveal the things that I've dealt with along the way, from my friendships and body-image worries to relationship stress and online trolls. And I'll show you just how I've managed to get myself back in balance each time, work hard and create a life I love – categorically.

I want this book to make you laugh, make you think, make you feel inspired and, most of all, make you realise that you too can achieve your dreams.

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FIRST STEPS

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A LITTLE GIRL WITH BIG DREAMS

My parents always say that the way I look at life doesn't come from them. My mum used to joke, 'Molly's not ours, she's the milkman's child!' because it just wasn't really normal in my family to have all this ambition, to have these big dreams ... but then there was my auntie Jackie.

I often say that a lot of my ambition came from my auntie Jackie – that's my dad's sister. She really was someone who I truly looked up to when I was growing up. She had an incredible job. She drove an incredible car (a Porsche). She had an incredible house. She was always draped in Louis Vuitton bags and designer clothes – my mum says that I definitely got my love for the nicer things in life from my auntie! And she was always seeing really successful guys. Plus, she was just beautiful, with long blonde hair; she really looked after herself.

But the fancy clothes and bags and cars weren't the reasons I admired Jackie. I looked up to her because she taught me that you could do it for yourself: Jackie was an accountant, which is what gave her this great lifestyle. When I looked at my auntie, I knew: *That's the life I want to live. I want to be like her when I'm older. I want to have money of my own. I want to be an independent, strong woman.*

Even as a child, I just knew that whatever I ended up doing, it needed to be big and out of the ordinary. And though they might not necessarily want all the same things from life as I do, my family has always been so understanding and supportive of that. They've let me be myself – and supported in me in so many ways – which I'm so grateful for. As you'll see, they really helped me get started, first as an influencer, and later as I grew my businesses.

But to start, let's go back a bit earlier ...

FAMILY TIME

I was born in 1999 in Stevenage, Hertfordshire, at Lister Hospital, with a distinctive strawberry birthmark on my forehead (and no, I don't have it anymore). I grew up in Hitchin, another town in Hertfordshire, and lived in the same house almost all my childhood with my mum, Deborah; dad, Stephen; and sister, Zoe, who's three years older than me. My parents met working in the police. They've both had long careers with the Hertfordshire police force: my mum started as a police officer, then worked in the control room answering 999 calls, while my dad ended up

as an inspector before retiring from the police. I've always loved telling people they were police officers and am super proud that those were their jobs.

My family is so small: no cousins, only one living grandparent – just tiny. Both my grandparents on my dad's side died when I was really young, while my mother's dad died when she was only 24. When I talk on Instagram about how small our family is, my dad will sometimes message me, reminding me, 'Molly, you have lots of cousins twice removed that follow you on here!' But to me, my family is the people who were there on Christmas Day and on birthdays: my mum, dad and sister, my nana (my mum's mum) and my auntie Jackie. (And since they remember these early years better than me, I'll let them tell you a bit about what I was like, too.)

When I think back to my childhood, I always think about the holidays we had as a family. We never went to Disneyland or Florida or anything like that for our holidays – we'd go to the Isle of Man for a walking trip, hiking every day, or something like that. My parents would take me and my sister to climb ridiculously big mountains like Snowdon in Wales and Helvellyn in the Lake District! We were such an active family.

Our sporty lifestyle was mostly driven by my dad. He's always kept fit and is actually an ultramarathon runner these days, so it makes sense that he pushed me and Zoe to get into sports and be healthy. He was always taking the two of us swimming or running, and if there was adrenaline involved, he'd jump in feet first. When we'd go on a family outing to a theme park or water park, for

instance, he'd be the one taking us round on all the rides. I think he loved them as much as we did! So in that way he was just a big kid and a really cool dad to grow up with.

While my mum was active too, she's the one who encouraged my creative, theatrical side. Raising us girls, she was just the most dedicated, caring mum. She wanted the best for us and really inspired me to go for my dreams. Not only that, but she went to great lengths to help me make them happen. From when I was young and showed a desire to perform onstage, she'd drive me to theatre auditions all over the country. One year, a theatre group we knew about was putting on a production of *Annie*, and I really wanted to get the lead role. Like I said, she took me all over the place to audition for it, and I know that even if I'd got the part at a theatre three hours away, she'd have been there, taking me to every rehearsal – she was that invested. (Sadly I was never cast for anything but the chorus! But more on that later ...)

On Sundays we used to go to church, because my nana is really religious, and we'd have a roast dinner, but that wasn't really our special family time. The happy family time that I remember having together would be on those walking holidays: going to the Lake District, going to Wales, walking round the Isle of Man – that was sort of how we bonded as a family.

My friends would be on summer holidays to America or Egypt, and I'd be in waterproof trousers and a rain mac, walking 12 miles a day at eight years old. I walked up Snowdon at six, which just goes to show the way my parents were: there was no opting out of things like that. (Looking back, I think my mum would have

probably wanted to go to Florida as well! But my dad loved those active holidays, so we'd do it for him.)

KEEPING BUSY

We weren't just an active family on holidays, either. I was put into every single extracurricular activity possible. First it was ballet and Brownies, when I was younger. Later on, I swam five times a week, ran twice a week, played an instrument (the cello), had singing lessons, was in the local youth orchestra and the choir, did Irish dancing ... you name it. If there was a club, I was in it.

Molly's mum, Deborah: *'As a child, Molly was strong-willed, adorable, beautiful, entertaining, funny, and loved putting on little shows – she loved the stage, but was never picked for the main roles (only ever the chorus), which was always a source of frustration for her. She was self-driven and won a competition for a teen magazine photo shoot at about age 11, which she entered herself. She knew her own mind, even if that meant getting her gorgeous long hair cut off in preference for a Frankie from The Saturdays look.'* (Which I will tell you about later!)

'She was a talented cellist – she was never going to play an instrument that any of the other children in her class played.'

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But she was her swimming coach's worst nightmare ... She hated swimming and put little effort into her training. As a result he often had her out on the side doing press-ups as punishment!

'As Molly got older, she and I had an amazing bond. She would never want to go on sleepovers and always wanted to be at home. When she went on a school ski trip, she was terribly homesick. But she was very confident: later on, when she started with Insta, she knew exactly what look she wanted. Sometimes she'd reject hundreds of photos!

'How would I describe her these days? She is unargumentative and generous. She loves her family and friends deeply. She is charitable and always gives to the homeless, just the same as when she was a child and would give up a bar of chocolate for someone living on the street. She's very humane and sensitive (she would never watch the film Marley & Me, as it's about the death of a dog). And she hates blood and needles (yet loves a horror film). Her bad habit now is only being in contact when she has a problem. I guess that's what mums are for!

'In the future, I would love to see her in a presenting role on TV. I would like her to use her platform to be a good role model for young women. I would like her to be financially secure for life. Most of all, I want her to be healthy and happy and have a long life.'

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As I've said, my parents were really sporty – both marathon runners. Zoe, too, is very talented at sport, but that was more her thing than mine. These days, Zoe's a medic and a PT in the army, so she basically trains the other army members to be fit. Whatever I did, I tried to do it to the best of my ability. (OK, maybe not so much with the swimming! But I didn't really get that sporty gene.)

In almost every activity I did, there was an element of competition. From the swimming to the running to the Irish dancing, there was always that scrutiny. Still, I was never actually that good at anything that I did then, but I was fine with that. It didn't bother me whatsoever.

At one point, the swimming coach actually suggested to my dad not to bring me anymore. He told him, 'She's not any good. She's actually holding the rest of the squad up – we're having to not carry on to the next 100-metre freestyle, because she's still finishing that 100-metre backstroke. She can't do it!'

But my dad told him, 'She's doing it and she will get better at it.' Even if I'd never be a champion swimmer, I was learning a real lesson in perseverance: how to commit to something without expecting an immediate reward.

Molly's dad, Stephen: *'Molly was a difficult baby in terms of lots of projectile vomiting, which bounced off the wardrobe doors in her bedroom like a scene from The Exorcist.'*

(Thanks, Dad!) *'She was a light sleeper, too: I used to have*

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to lie on the floor next to her cot and have a hand on her back through the bars, then crawl out of the room when she finally slept – then she would wake the minute I was over the threshold, so I spent a lot of time sat in the rocking chair in her room with her.

‘As a kid she was delightful and energetic and fun from the off – I used to love my time with her when I was on rest days from the police and Zoe was at nursery or school. I would take Molly to the local pub, where they had a large soft-play area, and we would play and draw and colour for hours – such great fun. I also used to take her to a large shopping centre with designer clothes shops from a young age as it was a safe space for her to wander and had lots to see. So maybe it’s my fault she got into some things! We’d go there with my mum and have a walk and a cake and spend time just watching the world.

‘As dad to two daughters, I felt it was unfair for a girl to have the birthmark in such a prominent location – I used to get into verbal fights with people who said rude things about it when they saw it and only because I was a copper did I stop myself “chinning” a few. Once she started school, she was a cheeky monkey: teachers either loved her or didn’t – at a young age it was 90 per cent who loved her, and the birthmark gave her an adorable quality. A lot of people stood up for her and protected her from cruel remarks – I genuinely think this birthmark defined some of her resilience to the media that she has now.

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'As a youngster, Molly was always looking for her passion. Eventually, she found herself in terms of Irish dancing and some stage acting and singing at school. I would absolutely love taking her to full-weekend Irish feis (competitions) and often was the only dad there doing his daughter's hair or helping the mums do the food. Again, it was such fun and I loved cheering her on.

'Molly joined her sister at swimming and spent many hours at swim training, but I remember she was just there for the social time and chats with mates. Now, I can see it was her character: she is and always has been a people person. Other parents loved her; teachers and instructors found her frustrating as she knew her own mind and stood her ground – great qualities I watched develop in her and now see as strong parts of her being. She would always argue with me, but from a fact-based point, and she'd often win. I'd then find myself resorting to "I'm your dad, do as I say."

'She was always too scared to go on school trips and stay away from home or sleep over at friends' places. She would go and then come running back in the late hours. At the same time, she was always outgoing. She and Zoe would sing, dance and play together so well on camping trips and keep each other entertained – they would make fun of me constantly, as I had no rhythm or timing and couldn't dance. They would often say, "Dad, keep the beat to this," as we were driving, and they knew I had no chance!'

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For me, my favourite thing of all was Irish dancing. I was dancing from a young age, six or seven, and I really, really loved that. It wasn't something that ran in our family: it was just that, one evening at the pub, a friend of my mum's had mentioned that she was taking her daughter to this Irish dancing class. My mum thought, *Oh, I'll send Molly with her, then* – and that was it. Soon, I was dancing three times a week. No one at school was doing Irish dancing; it was seen as a really different hobby to have. But again, it was that thing of my always wanting to be doing something a bit different.

My parents would take me to all the *feis* competitions and it could get expensive as well, to buy all the kit: we needed special dresses, shoes and even wigs. In Irish dancing, you wear wigs made up of loads of ringlets so that when you jump, the ringlets bounce up to give the illusion that you're jumping higher, to impress the judges. One of these wigs would cost maybe £100, which felt like so much money to spend on a wig at that age. When my auntie Jackie bought me one for my birthday, I just thought it was the best thing I'd ever been given. It was completely the wrong colour for me, because I had quite mousy brown hair then, and this wig was bright blonde. I didn't care! I loved a bit of glam, even then.

Despite the glam, it was hard work: it's crazy, the commitment that goes into Irish dancing. I did it for quite a few years, eventually placing fourth in the All England competition when I was about 14. I wouldn't say I was ever really *that* good at it, but I did love it. It was just so fun.

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Auntie Jackie: *'Growing up, Molly was fantastic to be with: fun, laughing, always giggling – her personality shone through from an early age. I have to say she loved clothes and dressing up, and had a real passion for her appearance, which is no surprise when we look at where she is today. She was constantly changing outfits, and you could also see that when she was doing her Irish dancing, she absolutely adored this and getting into costume. I remember when she was about six, I bought her a beautiful Irish dancing wig, which she took great pleasure in wearing.*

'She was fun, loving, caring, but very focused. I think she struggled to find her real passion in her early to mid-teens – but then when she did find it, she absolutely blossomed and really found out what she wanted to do with her life. Today, clearly, she's very busy, and very driven, but she's got a clear vision for her future. And she's learning all the time, and has had to learn incredibly quickly since she came out of Love Island, which I think she struggled with at the start. But now, she's got a good team around her and she's doing incredibly well.

'The best things about Molly? Her vision, her drive, her artistic nature and how hard she works to achieve her goals. The worst things? That's really tricky. I would say probably one of her weaknesses, which hopefully she'd agree with, is the fact she doesn't like conflict or having disagreements with people – that will come with experience and knowing how to handle things. But I think we can also say that when she feels that she's right,

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