

Interview with Marawa Ibrahim

World record-breaking hula hooper(!) and author Marawa Ibrahim talks to Young Scot prize winner Elissa about the trials and tribulations of being a teenage girl

Q: What was your inspiration for writing *The Girl Guide*?

A: When I was maybe 10 or 12, this was the book I really wanted and was looking for. My mum had lots of giant medical books which had really long explanations of things and I was like - this is not helpful, I can't read these words! I just wanted really straightforward answers but there weren't any. There were a couple of books in the school library which were very much like - you've got your period, now you can have a baby. I was thinking - I don't want a baby! What's happening? This is terrible! So, over the years I worked out the answers to all these questions. It took a while but then I was like, you know what, I think I could actually write one now. You think you know everything but it takes time. Just when you think you've worked it out, some other thing happens and you're like, what's this?

Q: What is your advice for staying confident as a teenager?

A: I think not letting things get you down. I know for me it would only take one piece of bad news or something not going the way I wanted it to go to say, 'that's it, throw everything out the window. It's over!' You have to trust that with time and with practise things will get better.

Q: What was the worst thing that happened to you when you were a teenager? How did you deal with it? How do you wish you had dealt with it?

A: I always remember a story my mum told me because I was so traumatised by it! She had bought these knickers that were like crazy knickers and she was all happy with herself. She went to a co-ed school and she was walking into the school in front of all the cool people, and the guy she had a crush on. She completely faceplanted and, as she faceplanted, she also hooked her skirt up and her crazy knickers, which she was so happy about, were on show to everyone. She got teased for 3 years. That is the worst teenage story of all time.

Public embarrassment is difficult. It's easy to say, much harder to do, but you have to just find a way to see the funny side. Now I can see it when something happens and I'm like, how long until I find this funny, is it going to be a day or a week. But eventually it will be funny. But you can't take things too seriously, even if they feel absolutely horrible at the time.

Q: In *The Girl Guide* you talk about Girls for Girls and the problem with women putting down other women. Why does that happen?

A: Oh my goodness, if I knew the answer to that... I don't know why we do it. It's strange. Being competitive is good but it's one of those things that gets a little tweaked somewhere along the line and it can be used for good or evil. That's something that I was trying to highlight in the book - that it's a really good, useful energy but we should look out for others and use it in a really great way.

Q: As a young woman, dealing with unwanted attention and even sexual harassment can be really difficult. What is your advice for girls who might have to do that?

A: I deal with this in the book and it was definitely one of the hardest chapters to write because it's a very hard topic to give advice on because, as most of us know who have had to deal with anything like that, on paper you want to say that no one should put up with this. If it happens, you have to tell everyone and point out who's doing it and all that kind of thing... But the reality is that it's not that simple - especially being the younger, more vulnerable person. You don't necessarily want to stand up to someone who might be physically bigger than you or in a position of power. But I think the way things have been going, especially recently, there's been a lot of push for people to feel more confident to be able to stand up to things that they know are not right, and I know that as I get older I have become way less tolerant of anything like that. The times I was in high school and you'd be catching the bus somewhere and something weird would happen and you'd just want to go home and not think about it, but now I will quite happily be very loud and yell at the person - but you have to feel safe at the same time.

Q: If you could give one piece of advice to your teenage self, what would it be?

A: It gets easier. I don't want to say that in a way that suggests that being a teenager isn't great. I loved being a teenager. I had lots of fun. But there were definitely things that were hard and that were unknown and I was like, is this it? Is this how it's going to be? I would say to myself, if I could go back in time, no, it's fine, you'll work it out. It gets easier. It's just like anything, things change, and it gets a lot easier.