

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Just for the Record
Geri Halliwell

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About the Book

'This book is about what it's like to strike out on your own. Some days you feel you can live forever, on others you can be your own worst enemy. This is my story of what happened next.'

In 1998 Geri Halliwell walked out of the biggest pop group on the planet and embarked on a journey into the unknown. Everyone except her, it seemed, had an opinion on what Ginger Spice should do next. She didn't know if she would make it on her own or fall flat on her face. All she did know was that it would be Geri, not Ginger, who this time would be leading the way.

Just for the Record is an incredible and intimate portrait of a young woman at the crossroads of her life, dealing with fame, fortune, and the constricting struggle to be true to herself.

About the Author

Geri Halliwell shot to fame as a member of the Spice Girls. Leaving the band in 1998 she pursued a solo career and enjoyed top-ten success with her first solo album going double platinum, and her first single from that album reaching number two in the charts followed by four consecutive number one singles. In April 2001 Geri re-entered the UK charts with 'It's Raining Men'. As her eleventh number one, Geri held the record for the most number one's by a female artist in the UK.

She released two bestselling health and fitness videos in 2001 and 2002, and has tried her hand at tv presenting and acting. Geri is also heavily committed to charity work. In 1998, she was made a UN Goodwill Ambassador. Geri works tirelessly for Breast Cancer Care, who made her a Patron in 2000, along with Cherie Blair. Geri is also an ambassador for The Prince's Trust, and regularly attends events in this capacity.

In 2006, Geri became a mum to a daughter, Bluebell Madonna.

Gerri Halliwell

Just for the Record

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DEAN FREEMAN



EBURY
PRESS

This book is dedicated to the walking wounded.
I hope you find peace, love and adventure.

John
x



Goodbye

LYING HERE IN the warm sun it's easy to drift off. Staring up at a cloudless blue sky and surrounded by palm trees that shelter the sun-deck from prying eyes, I can imagine — just for a moment — that I'm on a secret fantasy desert island, miles from anywhere. Only the muffled noise of the traffic from Sunset Boulevard reminds me that I am here in my favourite hotel in Los Angeles, an oasis of calm in the heart of the city. I've been here before but this time it feels different. It's the perfect place to reflect on the journey that has brought me here and choose the path to follow next.

Ronnie has just brought me my lunch by the pool. When I moved into my villa — just set back from the main hotel in the manicured grounds — Ronnie came with the package. His job is to look after me and make me feel at home, so I suppose you could say he's done a pretty good job. He's very funny, *very* camp and loves to chat. Today's lunch is steamed fish, mustard mash and broccoli with some herbal tea to wash it down. Sometimes you just have to be grateful for the trappings of fame and, when it comes to Ronnie and a delicious meal by the pool, I can honestly say that I am.

I can't say that I came here intending to reflect on my life or even to stay very long. I was drawn to LA by other attractions. The first was the sunshine. I come alive in the springtime so, tired of waiting for the end of the English winter, I wanted to be somewhere warmer. I had professional reasons to be here too. I'd finished promoting my second album *Scream If You Wanna Go Faster* and I

wanted to be where the action is. I had record producers to meet in LA and even some contacts to see in Hollywood.

When I got here I remembered that there was something else that attracted me to the city. Celebrities are ten a penny. Turn the corner and you bump into Christopher Walken making his way down the street with his shopping, go into a bar for a drink and there's Minnie Driver chatting to friends over lunch. Nobody points and nobody stares — in fact, in LA nobody *cares* and that's a relief. Last week, my sister Natalie came over to see me and we went to a theme park a few miles from town. We had a great time riding on the roller coaster and playing games on the stalls and we weren't disturbed by anyone. I can't see *that* happening at Alton Towers. I felt so happy. I felt free.

I got a call the other day from my manager, Andy. 'When are you coming back?' he asked. 'It's been a while now.'

'Oh,' I said. 'I'm not sure. I like it here. I think I want to stay a while longer.'

I could hear him sighing down the phone. 'OK,' he said, 'but Geri?'

'Yes, Andy?'

'Just make sure you don't get lost in La-La Land.'

I could see what he was worried about: here I was in Los Angeles miles from home and from the real world of Geri Halliwell — Pop Star. There's not much chance of stumbling across a copy of the *Sun* or the *Mirror* here or finding myself reading a magazine article with the headline IS GERI TOO SKINNY? I don't have to worry about walking down the street or going to the movies or popping to the shops. Here, I no longer have to deal with my fame. Maybe Andy was worried I was being swept up by the glitz and the

glamour of the Hollywood social scene but that wasn't it at all. If I was getting lost it was in the opportunity to feel like a normal person again, to step back from the madness and reassess my life. Do I really want to work on that new record yet? Are movies the right way to go? I like it in La-La Land.

It's never as easy as that, though, is it? Something always comes along to bring you back down to earth and my something came along a little while ago as I was relaxing by the pool:

*Monday 4th March 2002
Oh my God! Was reading by the pool this morning,
not relaxing when Chris showed up and walked
over to me. Not came up for a friendly chat.
Last time I'd seen him in ages, over two years
talk about blast from the past. Things move on
and that's ok.*

Everyone finds it embarrassing bumping into their ex but only the famous have the moment captured on film, sold to the press and discussed in the gossip columns. When Andy called to tell me that my meeting with Chris Evans and his new wife was all over the newspapers I was very shocked. Somehow somebody had managed to creep into the hotel and get the picture. It was terrible to realise that I wasn't even safe here but it also reminded me that in England it's like that every day of the week.

Chris hasn't been the only old friend to appear at my temporary home from home at the Sunset Marquis. Just

last week I was walking upstairs to the villa when I bumped into another:

Friday 5th April 2002
Was on my way back from the pool bumped
into Rob on the stairs. He's only staying in the
villa directly below me! Had a nice little chat
I both had such a busy few months it was
great to see him out of the blue.

Apart from the unplanned meetings, I've spent most of the time here on my own, like some old movie star in self-imposed exile. So it was great having Natalie over last week. We had a fantastic time shopping and taking day trips out of town and I even took her to the *Vanity Fair* party after the Oscars. It was so much fun because everyone was there and she loved seeing people like Oprah Winfrey and Tom Hanks. Now, though, even she's starting to wonder when I'm coming home.

'You can't live in a hotel for ever,' she said as we sat in a café after an exhausting shopping session.

'I know,' I replied. 'That's why I was wondering if you fancied coming and having a look for an apartment with me.'

And that's what we did. It didn't take long to find a perfect little place in a secluded spot a few minutes down the road. It looks like my days lying by the pool and drinking Ronnie's herbal tea are over, but it feels exciting to be moving somewhere a little more permanent. My life is at a crossroads in every way — career, home, family, fame — and this city 5,000 miles from home seems the best place to work out which way to turn next.

First of all, though, I have to understand how I got this far.

For me, the Spice Girls were more than *just* a pop band. In many ways they were my family, my personal support system.

Six months before I joined the group my father had died, suddenly, of a heart attack at the age of 72. Dad had always encouraged me to follow my dreams and was my greatest fan. His death left me feeling robbed, hurt and angry. I spent the months after his death in a daze. I sank into a depression so deep I wasn't sure I'd survive it.

The group offered me hope in this darkness: the hard work, the grand plans and the fun we had together allowed me to lock my problems away for a while. We became a family as much as a band. We even spent our early days living together. We were five girls in a three-bedroom house in Maidenhead queuing outside the bathroom for hours in the morning, sharing clothes and make-up tips and, most of all, working hard to make our dreams come true. Every day the five of us would pile into my little Fiat Uno and go to the rehearsal studio to work on our singing and our dance routines. We really were five wannabes and our success was built on a foundation of love and support. That closeness filled the empty space I had felt inside since my dad's death.

I could understand why the world was so confused about my decision to leave because I wasn't too clear about it myself. There were good reasons why it happened when it did but, even though they were important, the more I think about it now, the more I realise they only tell part of the story.

The girls and I always knew that a band like the Spice Girls would one day outstay its welcome on the bedroom walls of

Britain's teenagers. A group like ours needed to know the right time to call it quits and, in the early days, we talked about giving it our best shot for two years then getting out before we were past our sell-by date. At the time, two years seemed a long way off in the future and when we thought about the band's shelf life we never imagined what a phenomenon we would turn out to be.

By November 1997, the two-year mark didn't seem so far away any more and it began playing on my mind. At the same time the Spice Girls' insane schedule had taken its toll on me and my eating disorders had returned. My response was typical: I thought I could fix my internal problems by changing something external, which was why I thought we should part company with our manager Simon Fuller. Looking back Simon was a wonderful manager and I wouldn't be where I am today without him but, at the time, I believed that we needed a change. For a while it felt great that the girls and I were in control again. It was just like the old days in my Fiat Uno: five girls taking on the world. The downside was that, without Simon, taking on the world was a tiring business. It was ironic that we had sacked him because of our heavy workload but now we were working twice as hard to prove we didn't need his help.

I'd been thinking for some time that the Spice Girls should go out with a bang rather than a fizzle. One wet night in Frankfurt in early March 1998, on the tour coach on the way to yet another hotel, I blurted out that I wanted our Wembley show in September to be our last — a grand finale in front of our home fans.

I wanted to box it up in a nice neat package. The girl band thing conquered. Mission accomplished.

Their silent response told me the girls had other ideas. I suppose I hoped the others would agree with me but they

made it very clear that my departure would not be the end of the Spice Girls. They wanted to carry on. It was their group as much as mine and it was only fair that the majority should have their way. I could understand how they felt too. When something was working so well, why would you want it to end?

So why did I want the best thing that had ever happened to me to end? When the girls said they would carry on without me, I still knew I wanted to get off the roller coaster at the end of the tour. I hoped that the other girls would understand that this was the right decision for me and that things could return to something like normal until then. In the end, it didn't work out like that. Maybe the others felt as if I was abandoning them and they drew closer together. It was natural, really. We were preparing for different futures. I just hoped I could hang on for another six months, fulfil my obligations and say goodbye to the fans in my own way. That was all very well in theory but then something happened that, at the time, seemed to bring things to a head.

When I was eighteen, I was getting dressed in my little flat above a shop in Watford one morning when I noticed a small, hard lump in my right breast. I wasn't too concerned at first but I went to see my doctor, expecting to be told it was nothing to worry about. Instead, I was admitted to Watford General Hospital for an operation. They wanted to remove the growth and run tests to check if it was cancerous. I never really thought about breast cancer or the risk of losing a breast. When you're that young you think you are invincible and I suppose I just assumed everything would be OK. I couldn't really grasp the significance of what was happening to me at the time, but when the results came back negative a few days later, the sense of relief was enormous.

In May 1998, I learnt that the press were planning to run with the story of my teenage operation. I knew the story would come out one way or the other so I decided it would be better to take things in hand and speak to the press myself. That way the whole thing might be dealt with more sensitively and I would have the chance to make some serious points about the issue. I had just read the heartbreaking story of the journalist Ruth Picardie, a mother of two who died of breast cancer at the age of 32. Her book had moved me deeply and made me realise how lucky I had been. I saw it as a chance to give a wake-up call to other young women.

Although some might think it was just a slogan or a gimmick, I had always been serious about 'Girl Power' and felt that the Spice Girls were on a mission to save girls and lift their self-esteem. When I started focusing on breast cancer awareness I saw how all these things were connected, and when I was invited onto *News at Ten* to discuss my experiences I was delighted to agree. This could save lives, after all.

Unfortunately, the girls made it clear that they would rather I waited until after I left in September before giving the interview. I worked myself up into a state about it. At that moment, the band seemed less important to me than saving the lives of young women by raising breast cancer awareness. I was faced with a choice — stay until September and turn down the interview or leave the band now.

I remember saying to myself that this was not just about money or staying in nice hotels or being a celebrity, it was also about making a difference. The answer was obvious — it was time for me to go. That night at home in the little farm cottage in Hertfordshire where I was living I wrote in my diary: 'I have loved and lost. I give up. My heart is

breaking.’ There was to be no American leg of the tour for me, no farewell at Wembley and no more Ginger Spice.

At the time, and for a long while afterwards, it seemed to be as simple as that — the breast cancer interview had forced my hand and I had no choice but to leave. As time went on, though, I came to realise that while that issue *was* important, it was only one part of the picture.

Deep down in my heart of hearts I know that the disagreement about the interview was a life raft I used to get out of the group. In a way I was looking for a reason and that was the one that came to hand. I found it easier to talk about other issues and to focus on other things rather than face up to myself and how I was feeling. I’d always found it really difficult to say, ‘You’re hurting me’, but if I ever saw someone or something else suffering, something external, I’d find it much easier to stand up for them than myself.

The situation I was in was more a relationship breakdown than an argument of principle over one particular issue. In the end I think the actual situation itself was irrelevant. Recently a friend was telling me about an argument she had with her husband about one of them putting glasses in the dishwasher. They were absolutely flipping out about it and obviously it had got absolutely nothing to do with why they were annoyed with each other. It was the same with the girls and me. Of course they cared about the issue too. How they felt about breast cancer or how I felt about breast cancer had absolutely jack shit to do with my departure. It was the glass in the dishwasher, that’s all, and it could have been something else entirely.

I am grateful for the time I have had sitting in the California sunshine trying to come to terms with the choices I have made in my life. Leaving the Spice Girls has

always been one of the most difficult for me to understand. I suppose, for a long time, I didn't really want to address it at all.

I have always based my actions on instinct. It's quite a childish approach, you might think, but if I feel I need to do something I just do it without thinking the reasons through.

The thinking comes later.

One thing that *was* clear at the time I decided to leave was that inside Ginger Spice, underneath the make-up, the big hair, the giant platforms and the headline-grabbing dresses, there was a real girl and she was being suffocated.

The Ginger character was my own invention, of course, and did represent a side of me which, for a while, was a lot of fun. Although I was in my early twenties when I joined the group I was always a late developer — I didn't have my first period until I was seventeen and my boobs seemed to appear overnight at the same age — so I went through a late puberty during my years with the Spice Girls. Some people go through a punky phase — I went through Ginger and, for a while, I liked it. It was like putting on a uniform. You don't have to think, you don't have to deal with being a human being, and that was perfect for a vulnerable young woman who didn't want to feel anything.

I was going through so many changes that it was natural that a different person would come out of the Spice Girls to the girl who went in. By the time my four years was up, I was completely different. Ginger had served her purpose and deadened my pain for a while but now I was over her. In the end, I was just putting on a uniform I had outgrown six months or a year before I finally decided to take it off.

'Musical differences' is the classic reason given when a band splits up and they did play their part for me too. I

have always loved pop music and, while I can appreciate other styles like rock or dance or r'n'b, in my heart I have always been a pop music girl. Right at the beginning of the Spice Girls, the boss of the record company, Ashley Newton, had tried to turn us into an r'n'b group. He sent 'Wannabe' over to America to be remixed by some hot r'n'b producers. He brought us jungle versions and hip-hop mixes and I hated them all. Although Mel B was a big fan of r'n'b, she agreed with me that these versions just didn't work so we exercised our Spice veto! The single was released in its original, pop-tastic form and went to Number One.

But it became obvious to me that the others would want to move in that direction in the future and I knew I didn't want to go there with them. I've always been very pop-orientated; I like melodies more than grooves and for me that's the difference. Pop is about songs and r'n'b is about tracks. The simple truth is that I didn't share their vision. The others felt that they could take the group somewhere else but I couldn't see it and sometimes you have to step aside and let people be who they want to be. It made sense to me to let them go and let them grow in the r'n'b direction they loved. And, as it turns out, that was exactly what they did.

The only person I know who really understands how I felt at the time I left the Spice Girls is staying in the villa below me here in my LA hideaway at the Sunset Marquis. Robbie Williams knows how relationships work inside a successful band and how it feels to leave one behind because he experienced it when he left Take That. Being in the Spice Girls was like being in a marriage. The relationship between the five girls in the group was as close and intense as a love affair, with all the highs and lows that go with

that. But a marriage only has to accommodate two people and we had to find a way to keep all five of us happy.

We were five young girls full of hormones, under extreme amounts of pressure and with different kinds of egos and personalities. It was inevitable that we were not going to get on all the time. At the start of a relationship you fall in love and think the other person is the bee's knees. You think they are going to save you from your wretched self and that you will live happily ever after.

I remember those days with the girls with love and affection. Mel C and I shared a childlike fascination for pop music and the dream of making it. Emma was the little sister I never had and I idolised her for it. Victoria and I had an equal and quite grown-up relationship. We understood each other and I thought she was a very smart cookie and very funny.

Mel B and I were real buddies, always getting into trouble together. When the two of us were in our heyday, people would be horrified and delighted at the same time by our behaviour. We were like two Tasmanian devils bursting into the room, climbing on the table and dominating everything and everyone. It was very, very contagious and very strong.

The closeness of the relationships in the band was the foundation of our success but by the end we had started to squabble. Things were far from perfect and I have to take responsibility for my part in that.

A lot of successful people have very similar CVs — maybe a dead parent, a broken home, poverty, a sense of physical inadequacy. And these are all things that make you want to get out there and prove yourself. My childhood wasn't exactly the Waltons but whose is? While I was in primary school, my parents' marriage ended in divorce. With my father dying six months before I joined the group I had so

much drive, energy and passion for the Spice Girls because I felt as if I had it all to prove.

From day one I had always put all my energies into the band. I was full of creative ideas and I refused to accept defeat, play by the rules or take second best. I was persistent to the point of annoyance! If someone told me something couldn't be done it would be like a red rag to a bull. I'd see it as a challenge.

I think that many of us like to have partnerships with people who we can control. It is very hard to find a balanced relationship whether personal, business or creative. Some people like to be passive but some of us want to be the dominators. No prizes for guessing who wanted to be the dominators in the Spice Girls! Mel B and I very quickly assumed the leadership roles soon after we got together.

For the most part, these aspects of my personality were a definite bonus for the group but at the same time my dominant role actually reflected my weakness rather than my strength. I felt so out of control inside that I tried to take control of anything external, whether it was my weight, other people or situations we found ourselves in as a group.

Looking back, I sometimes overstepped the boundaries.

As the band's success grew things started to change and the leadership role I had played didn't seem so necessary any more. The Spice Girls had become a machine and we weren't driving it, it was driving us. The machine was bigger than the five of us and didn't need any emotional attachment or soul to run any more. The wheels were turning and I wasn't controlling the momentum. Without that control, I wasn't sure why I was needed. I began to

feel so useless that I would desperately try to regain the power I had had — even if that meant sabotaging things.

When I think about it now, I can see that this was going on as far back as the time we parted company with Simon Fuller. I absolutely adored Simon and he was crucial to our success but there was a tension in our relationship. A big factor in Simon's departure was me sticking my fingers up at him because I saw him as a father figure. There was a problem with the heavy schedule he had put the group on, but it was also about me playing the defiant, silly little teenager who wanted to be free and do it her way.

I tried to be the strong one in the Spice Girls even though, inside, I was just as scared as everyone else that things would go wrong and I'd fall flat on my face. At home when I was a young child and Mum and Dad were splitting up, I'd always played the role of mediator, Little Miss Fix-It trying to hold things together. I knew how to manipulate and calculate to get my needs met, and I learnt to read people very well. There's still a side of me that wants to reassure everyone that everything's OK, a side of me that won't let me admit my true feelings.

My family life taught me that reconciliation wasn't possible in life, only confrontation. I didn't know how personal or working relationships could survive when people disagreed or argued because my role models hadn't taught me how. I didn't want confrontation but it seemed inevitable if there was any sort of problem because I had no idea how to discuss things constructively.

I had good reasons to leave the group, but I was ill-equipped emotionally to work through the problems with the others and explain how I felt or find a compromise or solution. Things weren't right and my instinct had been to make a move — any move. Rather than sit down and talk

about things I had cried and bawled like a baby and thrown my toys out of the pram. Sometimes the only way to feel in control is to take action, whether that is spoiling a relationship or finishing a relationship. It's not about the quality of that relationship or whether it needs to end or not, it's about regaining control. And that is exactly what I had done.

So the reasons for my departure were a mixture of all these things. Part of it was about my belief that the group should go out on top, part of it my feelings about Ginger and the musical differences that were emerging in the group, but the split was also about relationships and my sometimes destructive attempts to keep control at any price.

My departure from the Spice Girls was sudden and the timing was far from ideal. The girls had to finish the last of their European concerts before starting their first American tour. The newspapers were full of speculation about the financial implications for all of us if the tour collapsed. I knew otherwise, though, because I knew how well the girls would respond to the added pressure my absence would create. They could make it without me.

Even though the timing was far from perfect, the fact remains that I had reached a point where I could not have continued.

I did a runner.

Some people run off before they get married. Call me a commitment-phobe, the sort of person who has a fear of intimacy when the going gets tough, but that was where I was at that time. There is never really a right time to make a break and leave, whatever the situation. I can rationalise and reason but the fact is I did a runner. And I'm not proud of it.

I could beat myself up for the rest of my life about my departure from the group but as I sit here in LA, mulling it all over, I have tried hard to take a more balanced view. We were all responsible for the state of our relationships inside the group and my motivation for walking out was not purely selfish. I had felt that leaving was the decent thing and that it would have been disloyal to stay on for the wrong reasons. I could have stayed and gone for the easy ride, turned up and put a mask on. I could have pretended everything was fine but would that be honest to the twelve-year-old girl who bought our records or tickets to our shows? Our fans really did believe in us and we owed them honesty at the very least.

As much as my ego found it hard to accept, I knew it would be great for the girls to carry on as a four-piece. At the same time, being in a band is like being in a nest — eventually you want room to open your wings and see if you can fly on your own. Deep down, I had always wanted to go solo, but it took courage to admit it and even more to give it a try. When I left, everyone told me I was mad to walk away. These days they congratulate me and tell me how smart I was to get out.

Inside my heart, though, I'm not proud of leaving when I did. I'm not proud about that at all.

The separation between us was pretty much total. They had the tour to get on with and I needed to have a cut-off period. I had such strong, different relationships with all four that I felt I had to make sure I got the clean break I needed. It's like when you finish with a boyfriend, you're never going to get a new one unless you put the old one down. I had to make room in my life and it was painful to both parties but it had to be done. I needed to face my demons on my own and they needed to work out how to be

a four. How could they do that if I kept on popping my head up and saying 'Hi guys, I'm still around'?

Just like any relationship it wasn't just the breaking up that was hard to do — the aftermath was pretty painful too. It felt as if a part of me had been removed, like I'd had an arm or a leg chopped off, because the group and the girls were such an important part of my life. Something magical had ended and I felt a tremendous sense of loss. I knew that I had made it happen and had wanted it to end but that didn't stop me missing the girls. They had been my family for four years.

In late September, the Spice Girls performed the final date of their world tour at Wembley Stadium. It was a beautiful warm autumn evening and I went for a walk outside in the fields behind the cottage where I was staying just as the sun was setting. I couldn't help imagining the scene at the stadium where the fans would be gathering, some of them believing the rumours that I would come on as a special guest for one last hurrah. It would have been wonderful if it had been true but this was no time for comebacks. I would have loved the chance to say goodbye to the fans who had given me so much, but it was not to be. It was a difficult night.

A few days afterwards, I went to stay at George Michael's house in the South of France near St Tropez. George and his partner Kenny Goss were friends and offered me their support as soon as I left the group. Their home was always open when I needed some comfort and company. I could kick off my shoes and try and relax, away from the glare of the cameras.

During my stay at George and Kenny's I heard that Victoria and David were staying at Elton John's house near Nice. I decided to give Victoria a call. It was the first time we had

talked since my departure but I was so pleased to speak to her and let her know I was nearby. After chatting for a while, we ended up deciding to meet for dinner that night, so she and David called over to the house and we all went out to have a meal at a local restaurant.

I have no idea how they knew but by the time George, Kenny and I arrived at the restaurant, there were already paparazzi waiting. They must have thought Christmas had come early because it was quite a line-up — a Spice Girl, an ex-Spice Girl, a pop megastar and his boyfriend and a superstar footballer. Word spread fast and pretty soon the place was surrounded. It was a nightmare. But it was lovely to see Victoria and David again and, once we were inside, we had a really enjoyable and mellow evening and caught up on the four months since I had left. At the end of the night we couldn't get out of the door for flashing cameras and that part of it was horrendous. In retrospect, I wish we had stayed at home that night but I was very happy that we'd met up and had a chance to talk. I have real affection for Victoria and David.

In the next few months I had what I call my 'Spice Girl Moments'— times when I was reminded of what we shared together or when I realised that it was really over. One day, a few months after I left the group, I was working with the stylist Kenny Ho — who I had known since my days with the girls and who was still working for them — when I noticed a beautiful golden shoe in Kenny's bag.

'Oh, they're nice shoes, Kenny,' I said eagerly. 'Are they for me?'

Kenny looked a bit hesitant before telling me: 'Sorry, Geri. Those are actually for Victoria's dummy at Madame Tussauds. I'm going there later so they can fit them.'

I think Kenny knew it would hurt my feelings and didn't really want to tell me but it seemed to bring it home: I wasn't in the Spice Girls any more. I remember feeling really left out. It took that beautiful golden shoe for me to realise it was really over.

It was very strange seeing the group performing without me. It was like seeing your ex-husband with another woman — you don't want to be with him any more but you'd like to think he still loves you. Part of me, the ego part, wanted confirmation that I was needed in the band. The bigger and better part of me wanted them to do well. After all, I'd helped create the Spice Girls and even I liked to think they would go from strength to strength.

I will always love the girls and I am so grateful for what they and the fans gave to me. We were together for four years but we crammed twenty years of experience into that time. I dream about the two Melanies, Emma and Victoria all the time and there's not a day goes by when they aren't in my mind.

At the end of that year, six months or so after I left, the girls were back at the top of the Christmas charts with 'Goodbye'. It seemed like business as usual. The song seemed to be on the radio all the time. I'd hear it when I was driving in my car, at home in my kitchen or working out at the gym and every time I did it would make me cry because I would feel so nostalgic and sad. It felt as if they were singing it to me. Nobody likes goodbyes but there it was — a goodbye song — and what else was there really left to say?

It was hard to remember how life had been before I walked into that first audition and began this extraordinary journey but now the most important, successful and rewarding period of my life had ended. I knew I had to move on but I

felt lost. For four years I had been consumed by the Spice Girls but now the other four were distant voices singing to me from the radio and visible only on the TV screen. I hadn't only lost my best friends and my career, I had also lost myself.

Without Ginger to hide behind, I wasn't really sure who Geri was any more.

Knock Down Ginger

IT WAS TOO late to back out now. I was in the green room, where they put the guests while they are waiting to go into the studio, at the BBC's *Parkinson* show, going crazy with nerves and worry. I was about to undergo my first big public interview since leaving the Spice Girls. I suppose you could say I'm drawn to danger or that I get off on fear because this was hardly a gentle comeback. There I was waiting to appear on TV's biggest chat show in front of an audience of millions! Bang! Welcome back, Geri! This was not a nice and gentle *Smash Hits* interview or an easy ride on a daytime TV sofa. This was hardcore. What the hell was I doing?

I sat there, fidgeting, terrified, waiting to go on. I was dreading the interview because I was so worried that Parky would give me a grilling about the reasons why I had left the band. It was January 1999, eight months after my departure, but I still felt very raw and very nervy. I knew he had a job to do and any interviewer worth their pay cheque would ask the question everyone wanted to know the answer to: 'So, Geri, why did you really leave the Spice Girls?' And Parky was the best in the business.

I had had a chance to sit down and chat about the interview with him earlier in the day and explained how vulnerable I felt. I hoped that we had found a balance between him doing his job and getting what he needed and me feeling comfortable. In the end, we agreed that we would touch on the subject but that he would respect my boundaries and not go too far. We said he could touch on my departure but he promised to be a gentleman and use his instinct. I was

reassured but knew that once I was sitting in that chair there would be no escape. Anything could happen.

That night I decided to wear my black polo neck and my black skirt. Black is understated but it says everything. I wear black when I'm feeling non-committal and undecided and when I don't want the world to look at me because I'm feeling fat. My family had come along to the show and I was in my dressing room when they arrived. They knew I was nervous and wanted to offer me some support and I remember my mum and my brother Max poking their heads round the door saying, 'You alright?' The trouble was that they were even more nervous than I was and they ended up making me feel more anxious!

The other guests that night were Dawn French and Carol Vorderman. Dawn's a really good friend, so it was a relief that she was on the show, although I didn't know Carol. I was the last one on and as I waited I watched the show coming through on the TV monitor. Hearing Parky in action was making me even more nervous but his interview with Dawn was fine and I started to feel a bit better. That was before his interview with Carol began.

There had been reports in the paper about Carol's relationship with her father and Parky asked her about it.

'Do you see your father any more?' he asked.

Carol didn't look too pleased with the question.

'Well, I don't really want to talk about it,' she answered.

I thought Parky would leave it at that but, being the interviewer he is, he didn't. Instead, he came back with the same question or a new version of the same question three times. There I was in the green room, which felt like my holding-pen, getting a taste of the treatment I could expect

in a few minutes' time and I started freaking out. Carol was looking pretty uncomfortable but I was going into a complete panic — Oh my God, it's my turn next! What's he going to do to me?

My appearance on *Parkinson* was a turning point for me. The eight months between my departure from the Spice Girls and my first real step back into the limelight had been frightening but exhilarating. When I left the group, part of my leaving agreement was not to talk to the press for the first few months. As well as giving the girls breathing space to be a foursome, which I felt was really important, it gave me time to just reflect and keep my mouth shut about the reasons for my departure and protected me from saying something I might later regret.

When I had first left the group I had been offered half a million pounds to sell the story to *Hello!* magazine but I was obliged to turn them down. I didn't speak to journalists for months after I left. I think it was really important that I didn't talk. You need distance and a bit of a cooling-off period. I wanted to tell my story in my own time and wait until I was ready, and that meant writing it myself.

In retrospect, taking on a project as time-consuming and emotionally draining as a book (*If Only*, as it came to be called) was not the most sensible thing to do at that point in my life. I was feeling really lethargic and tired every day. The last four years — in the eye of the Spice Girls storm — had caught up with me. I was absolutely exhausted. I was also feeling more than a little lost.

It was all very well deciding that I wasn't Ginger any more, but who was I? I had taken the Ginger Spice uniform off but I didn't really know what I was going to find underneath. I was so used to being two-dimensional with a switched-on smile and a cheery 'Hi!' that I didn't know how to just be