



The New  
Millennium Girls

*Callie's Contest of Courage*

by

Jan May

New Millennium Girl Books

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*For military families everywhere,  
who sacrifice in so many ways  
for our freedom  
every day-  
Thank You!*



# Contents

1.	Team Fleming	7
2.	For Daddy	18
3.	Into Bear Country	26
4.	Twins of Mischief	40
5.	Water-Balloon Bombs	49
6.	Sweetwater I Corinthians	61
7.	Hope	77
8.	Prayer Meeting	88
9.	Fun Fair	101
10.	Pie-Eating Contest	117
11.	Prayers at Midnight	128
12.	It Ain't for Babies	138
	<i>Activities and Projects</i>	151
	<i>About the Author</i>	161



## Chapter One

### *Team Fleming*

Callie squeezed her dad's arm as they huddled together on the beach blanket. "I love waiting with you for the sea turtles to hatch, Daddy."

Dad put his arm around her. "Look up there. There's nothing like the twinkling stars in the sky, is there?"

She gazed up at the milky night sky and inhaled the balmy sea air. "There's no other place I'd rather be on the whole earth!"

"Camera ready?" Dad asked.

Callie patted the camera on her lap. "Camera ready." She knew they had to be quiet and use a

night lens to take pictures. Any light might confuse the baby sea turtles, who must follow the natural light of the horizon and the white foam of the waves to find their way to the sea.

Dad looked at her with an approving gaze. "I think some special girl will be an award-winning photographer very soon."

Callie beamed. "Just like you, Dad. I hope I win the contest and get my picture published in *Kid's Animal World Magazine*. My website could go national!" Callie's stomach fluttered with butterflies. "Just a couple more months and I'll send my entry in. I couldn't have done it without you."

She crawled over to the bundle of sea grass surrounded by the yellow ribbon fence protecting the turtle eggs. *It's amazing how well I can see by only the light of the moon.*

"I think I hear something," Callie whispered. Her eyes spotted several tiny brown turtles poking their heads up through the sand. Her face lit up. "Aw, hello there," she whispered, bending down. "You three shall be named Joe, Kevin, and Nick." She giggled. "The turtle brothers. You guys will make big news on my Critter Connection website." She motioned with her hand. "Now, scuttle out to sea."

She held up her camera and snapped several pictures. "Can I follow this batch to the sea, Daddy, and chase away the birds?" She picked up several

rocks in case she needed them. No way would she let a bunch of hungry seagulls swoop down and eat these baby turtles.

“Yep.”

Callie heard Dad snapping picture after picture as she followed the baby sea turtles through the sand. After watching “Joe,” “Kevin,” and “Nick” safely splash into the foamy water, she ran back to watch for the next batch to hatch.

“Dad, look! Here’s four, five, six, and seven!” Callie hovered over the tiny turtles like a mother hen hovering over a batch of chicks. She grinned. “I love this time of year.” She sighed. “Did you know that scientists believe each baby turtle is born with an internal compass that leads them out of their shell, up through the sand, and out to sea? The mother turtle could have laid two hundred eggs here!”

Dad nodded, smiling slyly. “Yes, I think I remember reading that somewhere. Could it have been on Callie’s Critter Connection?”

“Oh, Dad! You know it was. It probably took this batch two to three whole days just to climb up from their shells buried in the sand.” Callie sat back on her heels and gazed out at the beach. A heavy feeling dropped into the pit of her stomach, chasing the excitement away.

“What’s the matter, honey?” Dad asked. He reached over and gently brushed a lock of hair from

her eyes.

“This moment would be practically perfect except for . . . except for . . .” In all the fun of spending the evening with Dad, watching the sea turtles hatch, she had almost forgotten. She looked up and bit her lip.

“Except for what?”

“Do you really have to go overseas tomorrow?”

“You know the drill, Callie. A Marine has to be ready whenever his country calls. *Semper Fi.*”

“I know, ‘always faithful,’” she said, looking down.

“You and Curt love our country and want us Marines to help keep it safe, right?”

“Yes.”

Dad flexed his arm. “Then it’s time to be courageous and use our faith muscles. You, Mom, and Curt are going to pray Psalm 91 for me, right? I’m counting on you.”

Callie threw herself into her father’s big, strong arms and hugged him tight. “You know we will!” *I always feel safe in your arms, Daddy. Now you’re going far away to fight to help others feel safe too. What will I do when you’re gone?*

“You’re my hero, Dad,” Callie whispered in his ear. “But what about the ‘I Love Nature’ photo contest? We were going to work on it together. I really want to win that internship at the zoo this

fall.”

“I have faith in you, sweetheart. You’re a good photographer all on your own now. I think you’ll snap a winning photo essay.”

Callie wrinkled her nose and kicked the sand. She wasn’t so sure. “Can we Skype and work on it together while you’re away?”

“Of course we can.” He looked at her with adoration in his ocean-blue eyes. “My little girl’s growing up.”

Callie stood and put her hands on her hips. “Seriously, Dad.”

He held his hand up for a high-five. “Team Fleming?”

She slapped his hand. “Team Fleming! Look, the little turtles are scuttling out to sea.”

Dad stood up and held his hand out to grasp hers. “Let’s follow this batch together.”



Later that night before bed, Callie and her younger brother, Curt, sat on the couch in the family room.

Dad stood in front of them. “Time for Team Fleming to put our family plan into action.”

“Right,” said Mom, holding up a calendar.

“Here are the days that mark Dad’s deployment. Callie, you come up first and add the days that are special for you in pink.”

Callie liked this part. She loved to use markers and stickers to decorate the calendar and count up the days until Dad’s return. She picked out the pink marker and wrote in large letters: **MARINE KIDS INTERNSHIP** across the second week in June.

Dad smiled. “You’ll love it, Callie. You can Skype me and tell me all about it.”

“I will, Daddy. I’m so excited!” squealed Callie. Then she took out an orange marker and drew a big circle around July 1. She took a sticker of a camera out and stuck it in the circle.

“I know that date,” said Dad. “It’s the deadline for sending in your photo-contest entry.”

“Yep,” Callie said, pursing her lips. “How can I ever win without you?”

“I know it seems hard, honey, but you have a good chance of winning,” said Dad, “even without me. Just remember all we’ve done together. And I have a surprise.”

“What?” asked Callie, jumping inside.

Dad reached into a bag and pulled out his camera. “You can use my camera while I’m gone. You’re older and more responsible now. I know you will take good care of it.”

Callie couldn’t believe her eyes. *Maybe this*

*deployment won't be so bad after all. If I can't have my dad, at least I can have his camera!* "I can use the super-telephoto lens. I know I'll get a good shot with that. Oh, thank you, Daddy!" Callie threw her arms around his broad shoulders. "And this is what I have for you." She pulled a photo out of her pocket.

Dad beamed. "It's you and me with the baby turtles."

Callie choked up and nodded. "Keep it close to your heart, Daddy, and come back to us soon."

"I will." Dad took off his red San Francisco 49ers sweatshirt and held it out. "And this is for Curt."

"Awesome!" Curt bounded over to Dad and shouted, "Put it on me, Daddy!" He raised his arms, and Dad slipped the sweatshirt over his head. Curt held up his favorite toy airplane. "And this is for you. Go help the good guys, Daddy!"

Dad hugged Curt and Callie tight. "You're the best family a guy could have. I'll be back before you know it."

Callie kissed Dad's cheek and held on to him very tight. She wanted to think about all the good things he would do in the world—how he would fight for freedom, peace, and the fair treatment of all people. But she couldn't help feeling like he was letting her down. Even though she had Dad's camera, she wasn't sure about it. She needed *him* for the contest!

“Okay, troops,” said Mom. “Time for family reading.”

Curt snuggled up next to Mom and looked at Dad with his big, blue eyes. “What are you going to read tonight, Daddy?” he asked.

Dad opened his leather Bible and sat down beside them. “The story of a brave shepherd boy named David.”

“I love that one,” Callie said, pulling up her knees under her nightgown.

“Now the Philistines gathered their forces against Israel to attack them. Three of David’s brothers were already at the battle lines. ‘Take this roasted grain and loaves of bread to them,’ said his father, ‘and find out if they are safe.’

“When David arrived at the camp, a giant warrior marched out of the Philistine camp. He was nine feet tall, wearing a bronze helmet, and his coat of armor shone in the afternoon sun. ‘Who will fight me?’ he roared.”

Curt sat, wide-eyed, on the edge of the couch. “Was he a superhero?”

“He was a super *villain* named Goliath,” answered Dad. “The Israelite army cowered when they heard him and ran away. All but one.”

“Was it David?” Curt asked.

“Dad nodded. “Yes, he knew God was with him, so he wasn’t afraid.”

Callie was thoughtful. “Was David born with

all that faith and courage?"

Dad's eyes shone. "No. He started out with just a little faith. Once a hungry lion came while David watched his father's sheep at night."

"What happened?" asked Curt.

"David had a choice to make. Either stand up with courage to protect the sheep or run away and hide and let the sheep be eaten. David chose to stand up with courage, and he chased the lion away."

"Cool," Callie said, smiling.

"Then, on another day, a hungry bear tried to eat a sheep. Once again, David had to choose to trust God to give him more courage."

Curt stood up and beat the air with his fists. "Did he fight the bear?"

"Yes, he did," said Dad. "God gave him strength to do it."

Callie reached her arm around Dad's neck and looked into his eyes. "So, God gave David *little* tests to build his courage muscles, so when the giant Goliath test came he would be ready?"

"That's right," said Dad.

Curt's eyes fluttered as he began to doze off.

Mom smiled. "Looks like it's bedtime."

Dad picked up Curt to carry him to bed. "Come on, sweetheart," he said to Callie.

Callie yawned, but she didn't want family time to end. She wanted to stay snuggled up to Dad and hear more about David's bravery. She kissed

Mom good night and padded down the hallway.



Early the next morning, Callie felt a nudge on her shoulder.

“I want to say good-bye,” Dad whispered in her ear. He sat on the edge of her bed in his camouflage uniform. He had a serious look on his face. “Listen to Mom and help her with Curt.”

“But, Dad,” Callie protested, “he can be so annoying when you’re gone. He can be such a little pest sometimes!”

He gave Callie his you’re-the-oldest look and nodded towards the Bible on her nightstand.

Callie let out a deep breath. “I know, I know. Love your enemy.”

Dad raised his eyebrows. “I was thinking more like, ‘Do unto others.’ That’s the problem, Callie. You have to stop looking at Curt as the enemy.”

Callie twisted her blond curls. “Dad, he breaks my stuff, he follows me and my friends all around, and he won’t leave me alone.”

“He just wants your attention. You two *used* to get along.”

Callie rolled her eyes. “But I’m older now,

and I need my space.”

“Have your space some other time,” Dad said, frowning slightly. “This is an important time to pull together. No fighting while I’m on deployment, okay?” He tousled her hair. “Sergeant’s orders.”

Callie chewed her lip and reluctantly nodded.

“What’s our verse?”

“With my God I can run through a troop and leap over a wall,” Callie said. “Nothing is too hard for Him.”

Dad put his arms around her and squeezed. Then he stood and smiled down at her. “That’s my courageous girl.”

Callie smiled faintly back and waved as Dad left the room. She loved her country but couldn’t help feeling worried every time he went overseas. She held her belly. *I’m trying to have courage, so why is my stomach doing flip-flops?*

Callie rolled over, pulling her pillow over her head. “God, I think I’m going to need an *ocean* of courage this time.” She thought for a minute. “No, cancel that. I need a miracle.”

