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Advice for young women? Ask a diva

By Elizabeth Wellington
INQUIRER FASHION WRITER

Prima-diva fashionista Cheryl Ann Wadlington decided it was high time she passed on some of her girly-girl knowledge.

So she teamed up with veteran journalist Sonya Beard and wrote a new book, *The DivaGirl's Guide to Style and Self-Respect* (The Elevator Group, \$15.95).

It's a good fit: If there's anyone today's young stylistas will listen to, it's someone who is thoroughly convinced of her own grandeur.

"I'm unapologetically fabulous," said Wadlington, CEO of Evoluer House, a local nonprofit that coaches young women on day-to-day life. "I don't have to make excuses for who I am. It's not up for debate."

That's the key message of this 260-page fuchsia paperback, complete with diamond-studded it's.

There's solid Cosmo-girl style advice on dating, how to protect against sexually transmitted diseases, and dressing appropriately both at prom and in school.

Wadlington also talks about why girls need to eat right, as in "salads, salads, salads," work out, and seek counseling when needed.

And in this age of cyber dra-



West Philly-bred Cheryl Ann Wadlington: "I'm unapologetically fabulous."

ma, Wadlington helps young ladies prevent tweets from turning a school year into a whole lot of *blah, blah, blah*.

"I'm talking to girls across the board," Wadlington said. "Girls are really struggling with these issues. They are figuring out how to deal with sexual orientation and how to maintain friendships."

Wadlington says today's poorly guided teens are growing into women who don't know how to meet their potential.

"They don't know what greatness looks like," she

said. "They are so bombarded with negative and degrading images."

She wasn't much different.

Wadlington, who grew up in West Philadelphia during the late 1960s and early '70s, was the youngest of six children. Her mother was a part-time government worker and her dad was a postal worker. She started modeling in local fashion shows and pageants when she was 5.

Wadlington's dad died when she was 12 and that was when she started to "act a fool." She became a mean girl, a bully who never missed a fight. Wadlington was suspended and her mom sent her away to boarding school.

"I had a lot of hidden anger, and I didn't realize why I was behaving this way," Wadlington said. "At that time in the African American community, therapy wasn't something we discussed. We thought an herb or church would heal everything, and that wasn't the case. I needed help."

Wadlington spent a year away, and when she got back to West Philly, she said, she was ready to get her life together.

She started modeling again, in New York, and attended performing-arts and theater schools in Philadelphia. Wadlington spent her teens

and 20s strutting on New York runways for Philadelphia-bred designer Willi Smith and appearing in commercials. She even worked as a show girl and dancer with the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus.

Eventually, Wadlington became a freelance fashion journalist and a regular at New York Fashion Week.

"I realized that I could do anything," Wadlington said. "If you invest in yourself, people will invest in you."

Seven years ago, she began the Evoluer House, recruiting girls through schools all over Philadelphia. So far more than 700 young women have graduated from Wadlington's 12-week empowerment program, which includes classes about etiquette, financial literacy, and body image.

Wadlington began working with Beard last year. She begins a national book tour this week.

"I want girls to know that when it comes to their lives, they should polish themselves until they sparkle, and sparkle until they shine."

Contact fashion writer Elizabeth Wellington at 215-854-2704 or ewellington@phillynews.com. Follow her on Twitter at ewellingtonphl.