

*Echoes of Mercy,  
Whispers of Love*

*writing by women  
for women*

Northern Lace Press

# *Echoes of Mercy, Whispers of Love*

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# *Echoes of mercy, Whispers of love.*

**The title of this book is taken from a hymn written in 1873 by American writer Fanny Crosby.**



Fanny became ill when she was a few weeks old. The family doctor was away, and she was treated by a 'doctor' who was later found to be an imposter. He treated her by prescribing hot mustard poultices to be applied to her eyes. This treatment blinded her.

Fanny was determined not to be held back by her blindness. After her father died, her mother went in to service, leaving Fanny to be brought up by her grandmother, who read the Bible to her. Fanny memorised chapter after chapter of both the Old and New Testaments, along with many poems.

When she was 14, Fanny was sent to the New York Institute for the Blind where she was a student and then a teacher. All this time she was writing poems. Her first recorded poem, written when she was 8, is:

*Oh, what a happy soul I am,  
although I cannot see!  
I am resolved that in this world  
Contented I will be.*



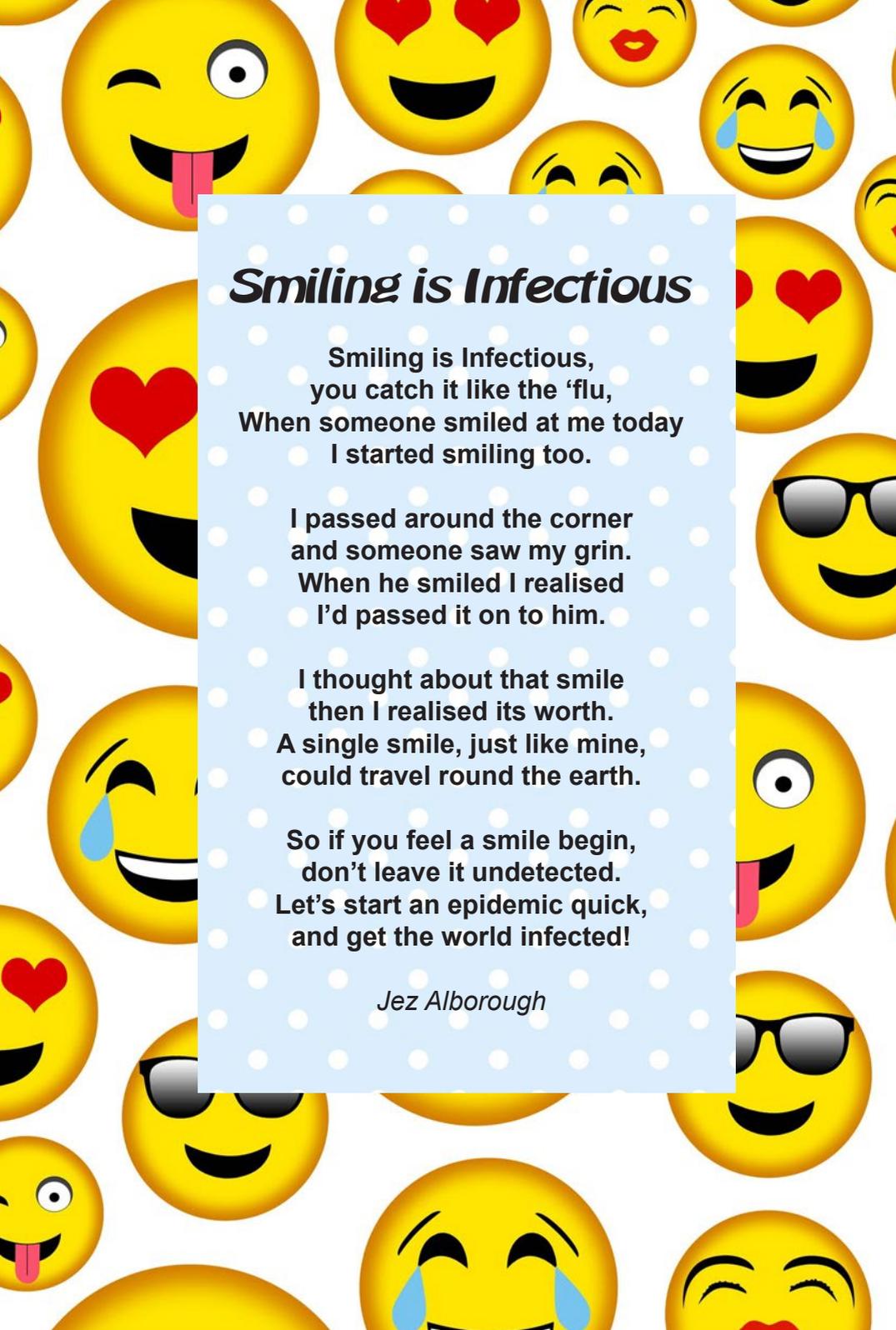
Throughout her life Fanny wrote hymns and poems for special occasions. Many of them sound overly sentimental to us, but to the people of her generation their ideas and language was wonderful. Though the language has changed, the truths of her words is still important today.

*Angels descending,  
bring from above  
Echoes of mercy,  
whispers of love.*



These are words of hope for all of us, whether we are confined by disability, illness or prison. Whatever our past, whatever our present, whatever our future, we are loved by God.





## ***Smiling is Infectious***

Smiling is Infectious,  
you catch it like the 'flu,  
When someone smiled at me today  
I started smiling too.

I passed around the corner  
and someone saw my grin.  
When he smiled I realised  
I'd passed it on to him.

I thought about that smile  
then I realised its worth.  
A single smile, just like mine,  
could travel round the earth.

So if you feel a smile begin,  
don't leave it undetected.  
Let's start an epidemic quick,  
and get the world infected!

*Jez Alborough*



Yes - there is light  
at the end of the tunnel

***But there are also  
flashes of light  
NOW***

# Laura's Story

"I have no alternative but to sentence you to life imprisonment." Hearing these words, I thought my life was over. Little did I know it was just the beginning.

Let me give a brief description how I got to that point. I started taking drugs in my teens and I quickly progressed to heroin. I had two beautiful kids who ended up in care because of my lifestyle. I've been in a few abusive relationships since I was seventeen, each one worse than the other. I have been homeless and in complete despair. I hated my life but couldn't see any way out. In truth, I didn't think I deserved any better.

One fateful day, me, my partner and another guy were in a flat, and the short version is, my ex-partner got murdered, something I have to learn to live with and will always regret.

My tariff was fourteen years; as I'm writing this, I've done nearly ten years. I have gained many skills and qualifications, and have met many wonderful people. I became a Christian and God has carried me through some very difficult times, and blessed me in so many wonderful ways. I'm not wanting to preach, but I need to say, God and my faith is such a big part of my life, and this wouldn't be my complete story if I didn't mention it. I had been searching for something but did not know what.

I was terrified coming up in the van, this would be my first time in prison, and I didn't know what to expect, but having watched umpteen TV programmes and films, my head was running a riot.

Be kind  
to your-  
self.

Even  
Unicorns  
need time  
out.



When I got there, I found the other women very nice. I was given a job, which was good, as it helped to give structure to my day and a reason to get up in the morning, to be out of my cell rather than sitting in my room with my thoughts, which was not healthy.

I started going to church services at the weekend, AA, Prison Fellowship and the gym on week nights. Listening to people at AA and at the Prison Fellowship who felt like I had, was a huge help; it helped me to start to see things differently.

The gym was a great way of dealing with stress, and really helped my mental health. At the beginning I could hardly run the length of myself. Recently I ran my first half marathon. Education became important. I now have a list of qualifications the length of my arm and have even done two years at the Open University.



I've been involved in lots of projects - dramas (acting), being part of a band - which have been of great benefit to me. I would never have dreamed of being on the stage in front of a whole lot of people: outside I would not even get involved in karaoke when I was drunk, but learning to do these things has been good for me, even to have a laugh at myself.

Another venture I got involved with was with the Samaritans, learning to become a 'Listener'. This is a scheme where prisoners could learn to become kind of 'counsellors' to other prisoners who wouldn't speak to staff about their problem, but would speak to other prisoners. I've been a Listener for eight years and it has been a great and rewarding experience.

All volunteer groups who visit us in prison do a wonderful job, but my Prison Fellowship volunteer friends have particularly been a blessing to me. I have built up wonderful relationships with them, and they have shown me so much love and support over the years. I know I told you I became a Christian, but the great thing about Prison Fellowship is there is no pressure put on you - many of those who attend

have no intention of becoming Christians, they simply enjoy the friendly atmosphere at the group (and probably the fact you get a cup of tea or coffee and a chocolate biscuit helps!). The Chaplains too, are very happy to take time to speak with you, and to pray with you and for you if you want, whether you have faith or no faith.

Some prisons have what they call a 'Recovery café', which is a kind of self help mutual support group for prisoners run by prisoners. Occasionally speakers from the outside were invited to join us. I found the Recovery Cafe very helpful. I was a very closed off, unemotional person. If you asked me how I was, I was fine, which we decided meant 'Feeling in need of encouragement'. At the café we banned the word 'fine'!

I've achieved so much since coming to prison, I've come a long way, but you need to know I'm not unique. There is nothing I've achieved that you could not achieve. I wish you every blessing, and pray your time in prison will be a turning point in your life.

*Stand Tall  
and Catch  
the Sun*





## Rhoda's Story

Rhoda was a maid in the house belonging to some of Jesus's friends. It was her job to open the front door. One night, not long after Jesus was killed and then came alive again, she had been very busy, as lots of the new Christians had come to the house to pray together for Peter, another of Jesus's friends. Peter was in prison for talking about Jesus. He was very heavily guarded and was due to be killed the next day.

In the night Rhoda heard a knock at the door, and went to answer it. She asked who it was, and Peter told her. She was so amazed that she ran into the prayer meeting and said "Peter is free - he is at the door!". It was then that she realised that in her excitement, she had forgotten to let him in!!

Rhoda was only a girl who made mistakes, but God had a job for her. He has a job for you, too.

## A Celtic Prayer

asking for help in a time of need

by Iain Tweedale

If you are anxious  
Just ask and I will hear

If you are suffering  
Just ask and I will draw near

If you are in pain  
Just ask and I will hear

If you feel overwhelmed  
Just ask and I will draw near

I am here for you always  
Just ask and I will hear.





# Julian's Story

We only know her as Julian of Norwich. She was born in 1343 and when she was 30, she had a grave illness. She was not expected to live but she survived and went on to write the first book in English by a woman. When she was ill she had several 'shewings'. Not dreams and not visions, she saw bits of Jesus's life and death, whilst Jesus explained what it all meant.



After she recovered she became an 'anchorite'. A room, or cell, was built on to the side of St Julian's church in Norwich. She went in, then the doorway was blocked up. She never left that cell again. The cell had two windows, one into the church, so she could take part in services, and one onto the world where people could come and talk to her and bring her food.

Julian was not a recluse, people came to talk to her. We know a bit about her life, including that she had a cat! She spent time writing about her 'shewings', explaining that God loves us so much, calling God our mother. Time after time she writes:

*What was His meaning?  
His meaning was Love.*





It's OK not to  
be friends with  
everyone

**Do not look too far  
forward.  
Just live a day  
at a time**  
♡ ♣ ♡ ♣ ♡

**Read.**  
♡  
**(And if  
you can't  
read,  
learn.)**

*You have a choice.  
To wallow in self pity, guilt  
and remorse, or to make the  
most of the  
opportunities on offer.  
Choose the latter.*

Have something  
to focus on  
for example  
doodling  
getting fit  
a journal  
creative writing  
colouring  
etc.

*When I came to prison I had absolutely no self  
esteem or confidence, but over the years  
the skills and qualifications I've got,  
have helped build them up.*

Prison officers get a bad press, and  
yes they have to keep good order, but  
I've had amazing help and encour-  
agement, even friendship, from staff.  
Don't see staff as the enemy, but  
rather there to help you.

**Tell your self  
something  
each day.**  
**I told myself  
I am strong.  
I can do this.**

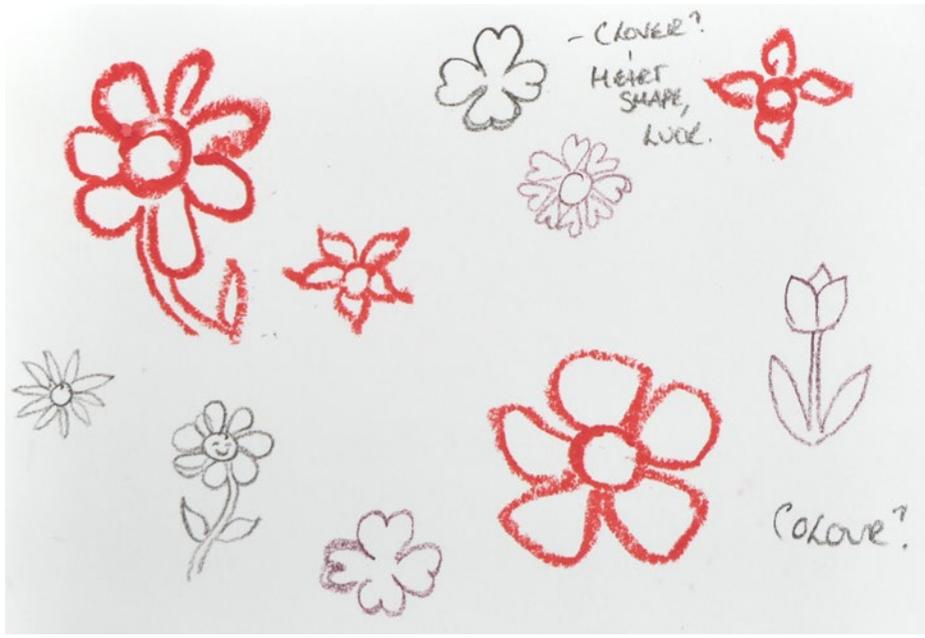
It's OK to cry,  
but remember  
**YOU CAN DO  
THIS**  
♡ ♣ ♡



# Making Cards

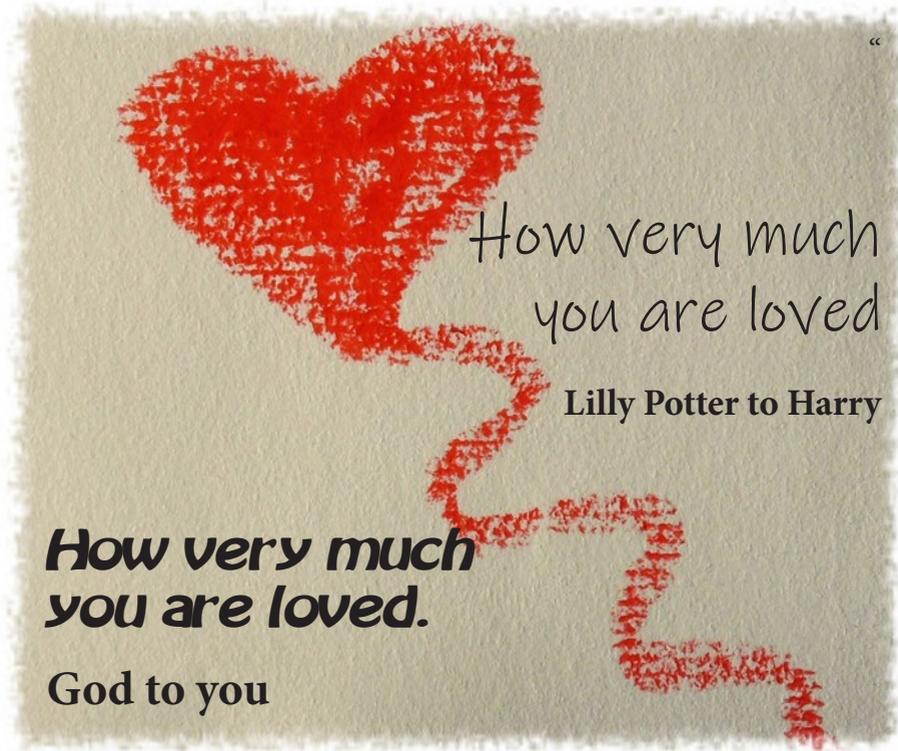


Make cards for your friends, your children or your parents. Make them to say Thank You, Miss You, Love You, Get Well, or just Thank You for Being My Friend. If you have scissors and glue, cut out pictures from magazines to stick on your card.



You don't need loads of stuff or be good at drawing to make cards that people will enjoy getting. Here are some examples made by folding a piece of paper or card in half then using felt pens, lipstick, eye liner or lip liner to draw the design.





How very much  
you are loved

**Lilly Potter to Harry**

**How very much  
you are loved.**

**God to you**

Is there anyplace I can go to avoid you,  
God?

to be out of your sight?

If I climb to the sky, you're there!

If I go underground, you're there!

If I flew on morning's wings

to the far western horizon,

You would find me in a minute—

You are already there, waiting!

## Sarah's Story

The cell door closed shut.  
Its cold, quiet. I am all alone.  
This is real.

I can hear people shouting and someone crying.  
I can feel her tears - oh my goodness, she seems really upset.  
Then I realise the person crying is me.  
How was I going to get through this?

I prayed. I needed to know God loved me.  
Within a couple of days I kept having the same word in my head,  
I was not sure what it meant.

### HOPE

God gave me hope: He came beside me when I was on my own  
in my cell, and I definitely felt his presence.

I knew that with God I could get through my sentence. He gave  
me my strength.

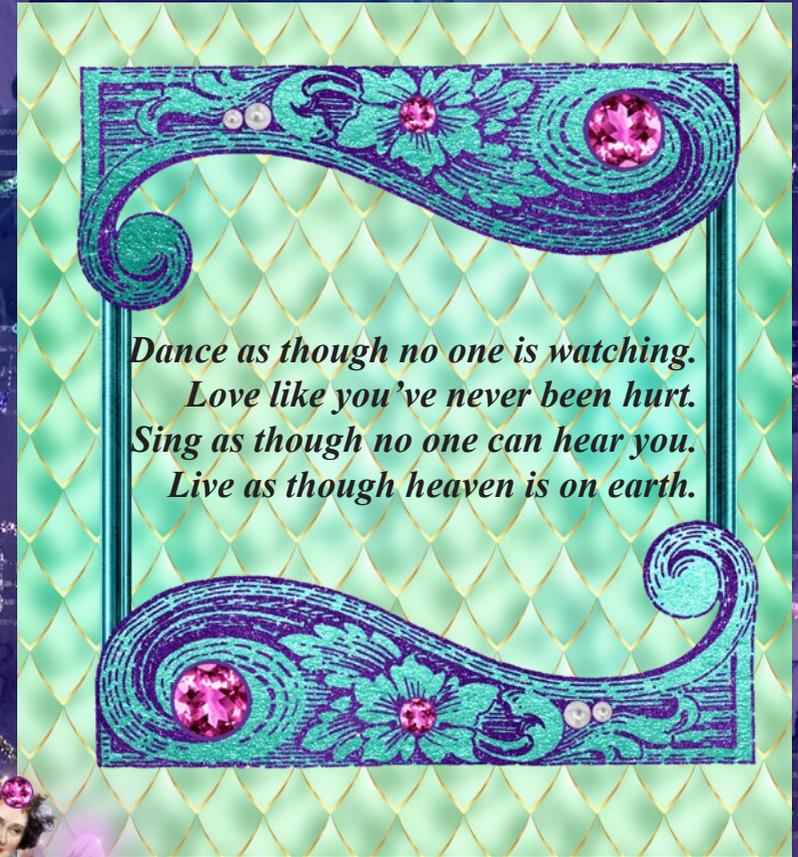
**NOTHING  
can ever separate us  
from God's love.**

# YOU ARE ...

- |            |               |             |
|------------|---------------|-------------|
| Able       | Fantastic     | Outstanding |
| Amazing    | Gorgeous      | Precious    |
| Beautiful  | Grand         | Shining     |
| Bonny      | Happy         | Smart       |
| Brave      | Insightful    | Sonsy       |
| Braw       | Incredible    | Special     |
| Brilliant  | Important     | Stunning    |
| Canny      | Inspirational | Strong      |
| Capable    | Inspiring     | Supportive  |
| Confident  | Just you      | Swell       |
| Deserving  | Kind          | Talented    |
| Determined | Loveable      | Valid       |
| Dynamic    | Loved         | Valued      |
| Enchanting | Lovely        | Wonderful   |
| Enough     | Magnificent   | Worthy      |
| Fabulous   | Marvellous    | Yourself    |

# ... AND YOU ARE

***the Best  
a Leader  
a Legend  
The One  
a Blessing  
a Trooper  
a Canny Lass  
an Encourager  
Worth the Effort***



## FOR THE SAKE OF THE FAMILY

As I walk through the shopping centre watching people shopping and laughing I feel so sad and isolated. Let me explain, my name is Sally and I try to work really hard to give my beautiful daughters everything they need.

Everything was going great until just before last Christmas when I lost my job. I was so desperate to make sure they had a great Christmas that I went to a loan shark. Thinking back, it was the best Christmas, ever. Their smiles were so worth it. But now as I sit here I am racked with worry, as he is coming for a payment at four o'clock and I don't have the money. It was such a stupid thing to do and now I don't know what to do.

As I keep walking, I stop outside a very expensive shop, take a deep breath, then walk in. As soon as I enter a snooty woman comes over to me, asking if she can help. I politely say no and walk slowly around the shop. I know what I am in for. I stroll on, pretending to admire all the elegant scarves. Suddenly I stop at a counter which holds beautiful bracelets and necklaces.

'Oh dear God please do not hate me for what I am about to do'. Before I know it I have picked up a bracelet and put it in to my bag. Relief washes over me. I start to walk to the door and I know I will get good night's sleep tonight.

.....

Mrs Watt is a tall lady who has hair as golden as the sun, and wears small gold rimmed glasses that are perched on the end of her nose. She is the type of lady who always has to look her best. Mrs Watt is a happy, warm friendly person who is always smiling. Well, that is until she is angry.

When that happens, her ears start to stand up and her eyebrows arch and that is exactly what happened now. She looked really angry as she walked quickly over to the girl to find out what had happened. Mrs Watt did not hold back, she had a right go.

'When were you going to pay for these?' As she spoke she had one hand on her hip and one hand pointing right at the girl. It was like watching a teacher giving a pupil a telling off.

'I... I am sorry', was all the girl could manage before she burst into tears. It was not the response that Mrs Watt had expected. As she took the girl through to the office, Mrs Watt thought that there was something a bit different about this girl. She just could not put her finger on it. As the girl started to explain about losing her job, the wonderful Christmas and the loan shark, in between tears, she really started to touch Mrs Watt's heart and reminded her of herself.

As the girl continued to explain her story, Mrs Watt noticed that her eyes were all bloodshot from crying. Mrs Watt thought of her own younger self. Just after she left school and got in a lot of debt and did not think she had a future and that everything was going wrong. That was, until she had met Grace, a lovely woman who had taken her under her wing and given her a job. More importantly, Grace had been a friend to her.

Mrs Watt had been working in the shop for years when Grace reached retirement age, Grace did not want to just sell the shop to just anyone; she wanted it to be someone who was enthusiastic about the shop. It was not just a shop to Grace, it was her life. Mrs Watt got a loan to help her to buy the shop, and now it is a growing success.

As she took a small sip of her coffee, Mrs Watt smiled. Looking at the girl who sat across from her, Mrs Watt thought about how far she herself had come since she had been in much the same situation. She left privileged that she had been lucky enough to have had someone to help her when she needed it.

She realised she had the opportunity to help someone too, and it made her feel really good inside, She told Sally that everyone needs someone to look out for them. As they talked more, Sally started to feel more at ease and a lot more calm. As Sally showed Mrs Watt the tatty old photo of her daughters which she always carried in her wallet, Mrs Watt could see how much her children meant to her. It made Mrs Watt realise that sometimes people have to do things they know are wrong for the sake of their family.

When Mrs Watt offered her a job, Sally did not know what to say. She just knew that life was going to get a lot better from now on.

.....

As I entered the lovely store, I was looking for a nice birthday present for my mum. While I was deciding on what to get, I did see a woman walking about but I didn't think anything of it at first. Then, as I was choosing between a white gold watch or ring for my mum from the wonderful selection, I suddenly looked over to the other side of the shop, where I just noticed taking some items and putting them straight into her bag. I was really shocked do I say something or not?

I was not sure what to do. I was frozen to the ground. As the manager and the girl went walking into the office I realised who she was. Her name is Sally and her daughter is my daughter's best friend. She always seems so happy; always

God has not promised skies always blue,  
Flower-strewn pathways all our lives through;  
God has not promised sun without rain,  
Joy without sorrow, peace without pain.

**But God HAS promised strength for the day,  
Rest for the labour, light for the way,  
Grace for the trials, help from above,  
Unfailing sympathy, undying love.**

*By Annie Johnson Flint  
who spent most of her life  
in bed and in pain*

giving her daughters lots of kisses and cuddles all of the time. I am sure that there must be a perfectly good reason for it because you can tell that she is not the type of mum who goes stealing.

I think I will wait. It will be nice for her to be met by a friendly face. It seems like forever that they have been in that office I hope that everything works out for the best. Oh here she is and she is smiling that must be a really good sign.

'Sally, hi, your Lucy is in my Becky's class. Is everything ok?' I was standing hoping to hear good news.

'Yes yes everything is fine. I made a terrible mistake today to try and help my family but now I have a job and new friends and everything looks like it is going to be ok'.

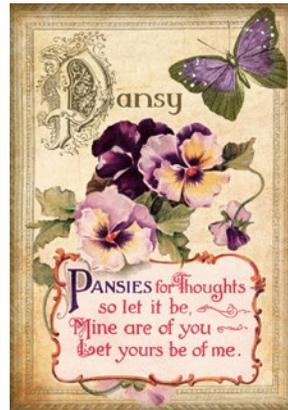




Some of these meanings are world-wide, such as a red rose for love, but others differ. In the west, white flowers show innocence but in Asian cultures they symbolise death.

The illustration above is typical of a drawing where the flowers have been thought out carefully. The greenery of fern, ivy and willow denote sincerity, friendship and freedom. Daisies of all kinds show innocence and hope; violets show loyalty; pansies show thoughts and fun, while clematis shows mental beauty.

Many flowers show friendship, including hydrangeas, freesias, sweet peas, irises and yellow flowers (plus so-called weeds like dandelions). When you do not have access to the real flowers, cards with drawings or pictures of these flowers are just as good, and for birthdays, why not make cards including the special flower of that month?



## Birth Month Flowers

**January** - carnations and snowdrops show devotion, loyalty and love.

**February** - violets and primroses show faithfulness, humility and spiritual wisdom.

**March** - daffodils and jonquils show rebirth, luck, vanity and prosperity.

**April** - sweet peas and daisies show innocence, loyalty and transformation.

**May** - lily of the valley and hawthorn show humility, sweetness, the return of happiness and motherhood.

**June** - roses and honeysuckle show beauty, love and honour and devotion.

**July** - delphinium and water lily show an open heart, positivity, dignity and grace.

**August** - gladiolus and poppies show strength of character, honesty, generosity and moral integrity.

**September** - asters and morning glory show love, wisdom, faith and innocence.

**October** - marigolds and cosmos show stubbornness and determination.

**November** - chrysanthemums show friendship, honesty and happiness

**December** - holly and narcissus show good fortune, peace and merriment.

# Saint Therese's Story

Marie Françoise-Thérèse Martin had a difficult childhood. She had older sisters and a father who adored her, but her mother died when she was 4. She was fascinated by her church, and by the time she was 8 she knew that all she wanted to do was to become a nun, so that she could spend the rest of her life loving Jesus.

After 7 years of badgering the Church (right up to the Pope!) she was allowed to enter the convent at 15. She never left the convent and spent her time writing about her beloved Jesus, and trying to please him in every way possible. She died, aged 24 from TB, a common, fatal, infection.

It was Sister Therese's simplicity that influenced those around her. She used to talk of the 'little flowers of love' we can spread by doing little things in our daily lives, wherever we are.

***"Let us love,  
since our heart is made for nothing else."***

***"I seek little opportunities, mere trifles, to give pleasure to Jesus; a smile, a pleasant word... If I find no opportunities, I at least tell Him again and again that I love Him."***

***"The good God does not need years to accomplish His work of love in a soul; one ray from His Heart can, in an instant, make His flower bloom for eternity..."***

***"What do you say to Jesus?" "I say nothing, I love Him!"***

For years and years I was told I was not enough  
Too stupid, I don't look right.  
I'm not special  
No one believed in me  
You will never be anything  
Nothing special

***But the truth is  
I am loved  
I am special  
I am enough  
I am me***



Just be the best you can be  
And if you can be anything, be kind

***God will always love you  
no matter what***



## Joni's Story

When Joni, aged 17, dived into the sea one day in 1967, she had no idea it would change her life. That dive broke her back and made her paralysed from the shoulders down. During the next two years of rehab, she was angry, depressed, suicidal. Then she was taught to paint, holding the brush in her mouth. That was the beginning of accepting the life she now had to lead.

**God is never closer than when your heart is aching.**

**"Nothing is a surprise to God; nothing is a setback to His plans; nothing can thwart His purposes; and nothing is beyond His control."**

**He has chosen not to heal me, but to hold me. The more intense the pain, the closer His embrace.**

Over the next few years she began to realise the plan God had for her. She began writing, and started to advocate for disability rights. She was soon asked to speak at Christian gatherings, and to this day she travels the world telling people how God can use anyone, even if they are disabled.

## The Gratitude Plan



I was told to think of something to be grateful for, but I was going through a hard time and I couldn't find anything. However, I was encouraged to look at the little things - take time to breathe, what makes you smile - it gives you something to focus on.

**It doesn't change your circumstances, but it changes you.**

I remember when I was in prison my befriender asked me what had made me smile in the last couple of days? I thought it was a strange thing to say. **I was in prison!** Over the next couple of days I started to think and she was right. Make a list of six things you are grateful for.

### My Six Things

- 1 singing in the choir
- 2 creative writing class
- 3 God loves me
- 4 watching the sunshine, rain
- 5 laughing with other prisoners
- 6 nice coffee and chocolate



### What are YOUR Six Things?

I have learnt that whatever your circumstances, there is always something to be grateful for.



*No matter how far you have travelled*



*in the wrong direction,*



**YOU CAN ALWAYS  
TURN AROUND**

Be someone's sunshine today!

*All women have times when they feel unloved and helpless.*

*We hope this little book will help you to realise you are not.*

*You matter  
You are loved*

The writing and illustrations in this book have been made by women who have been confined by circumstance, illness, handicap or prison. We know what it is like to be robbed of confidence and self esteem.

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