

Listen to the Whisper

Freedom in the Midst of the Storm

Sandi Matts

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I have tried to recreate events, locales and conversations from my memories of them. In order to maintain their anonymity in some instances I have changed the names of individuals and places.

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*In loving memory of my Dad, who taught me to love life,
to laugh, and to dance with wild abandon.*

*For my Mom and John, who have so faithfully supported
all my new beginnings with encouragement and love.*

*To Jeff, Kelly, Brody, Abigail and Addison; May you
always find God and purpose in those He so lovingly
places on your pathway.*

I love you all. I am so very blessed.

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Introduction

Life is a gift. The people who are part of our lives are also precious gifts. *Listen to the Whisper* offers a glimpse into not only the day-to-day experiences but also the people who have enriched my journey. My life reflects that of a common, ordinary, everyday person. I am confident readers will relate to the personal stories shared and be inspired to recognize the whisper in their own lives.

Our journeys are interwoven through the ups and downs of life, each event presented for a purpose. Daily, we are confronted by choices as countless emotions signal us to uncover the possibilities which move us forward. I've learned that love is the source of power on my journey; love of self, love of others and love of a higher power.

The stories which create the chapters of *Listen to the Whisper* come from the pathways I've followed and the people I've encountered along the way. In

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quiet reflective moments, I recognize that each experience and companion on my voyage has graced me with an abundance of knowledge and a deeper understanding of love.

I have discovered that God speaks to us through others, offering hope as we listen for the whisper. Listening for the whisper means hearing the very breath of God speaking ever so softly but confidently, through each experience of our lifetime, through each voice we hear. The whisper comes when we least expect it. We just need to be sensitive and aware.

It may be easy to recognize the whisper in the happy times, but what about through the storms? Sometimes our lives are best illustrated by a thunderstorm with wind, rain, and fear motivating our reactions. Thunderstorms are powerful. They are a metaphor for the trials of life. If we just ride out the fury, we find a rainbow on the other side

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with its beautiful colors offering us hope, peace, tranquility, and a greater appreciation for sunny days. It may take work to clean up after the storm, but I have learned many hands make light work. If we look, we will find a crew on stand-by willing to lend a hand.

As I seek to know and understand the essence of God who created this amazing universe and all life which dwells here, I find love and peace in the midst of this chaotic world in which we live.

Listen to the Whisper was written to help others identify and connect with their inner spirituality and to find balance. As we seek, we will find the love of God in the most unlikely places; with someone who is dying, in a prison, while running a race or sitting under a willow tree. Learning to recognize God's voice in the midst of one of life's storms will help us live a life filled with peace, joy, and happiness. As we experience these emotions,

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we are reminded that love is the source that transforms our heart and soul.

Chapter One - Dad's Story

In the midst of gasping for each breath, suffocating in pain, his eyes intensely revealed his soul, and an eagerness to go home. His eyes traveled upward to a world beyond ours...to a place beyond beauty...a place surpassing faith and hope...a universe above our mortal comprehension of love.

My mom, my brother, and I had been taking turns for days, keeping an around-the-clock vigil with Dad. The cancer had taken its toll. He fought for so long. The doctors gave him three to six months; his battle and his victory came to an end after three years.

Two nights after Christmas, I clearly remember being awakened just after 2:00 a.m. Dad's breathing had changed. Mom and I sat by his side. We held his hands, Mom on one side, me on the other. All these years later if I just close my eyes and go back in time, I can feel the warmth of his hand in mine. Dad was our rock. Sixty-six was much too young to die. We had so many plans, so much life yet to be lived. How would we go on without him?

We sat immersed in our thoughts and time, waiting and hoping for a sign – any sign of life – when we were suddenly summoned back to the present moment. Not by

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Dad's shallow breathing or his crying out in pain, but by a presence, an awareness of a connection to a world beyond ours. Dad's eyes opened and took on an almost hypnotic stare as they traveled across the ceiling, glazing intensely into a universe beyond our mortal comprehension. As we looked into Dad's eyes, Mom and I both understood, His time had come.

We sat in silence, not in fear but in faith, holding on to every last precious moment we had with him in this lifetime. We were mindfully aware of the spiritual transformation that was taking place, but we held on physically as long as we could, gently caressing his hands, telling him how much we loved him.

Suddenly Dad whispered, "They're here."

I asked, "Who's here Dad?"

With a look of pure amazement he said, "The angels."

His eyes were aglow as he studied heaven's door and then, without warning, the physical bond was broken. Dad released our hands, lifted his hands upward, and with his final breath, gently called out, "Ma... Pa."

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His earthly journey ended as the angels, along with his mother and father came to lead him home, to meet the God he loved so much. With tear-filled eyes, Mom and I sat for what seemed like eternity, wrapped in emotional turmoil. With one brief whisper, Dad was gone and our lives were changed forever.

What a tremendous loss, yet what a gift. Faith, hope and love, the greatest trilogy of emotion. My dad who loved me unconditionally as only a father can love, who taught me right from wrong, and faith through actions, now gave me hope. Hope in eternity and in a world beyond our human experience. I found great comfort in knowing when it's my turn to meet Christ face-to-face my dad will be there with the angels to guide me home.

And love, what about love? Yes... as the greatest commandment proclaims, *the greatest of these is love.*

My dad's final gift to me was a clear understanding of faith, hope and love. The divine virtues I learned about in first grade catechism now have meaning and reveal the key to life and happiness. In Dad's dying, he was born to eternal life, and we observed the transformation of that process. This is an unmeasurable gift. I feel both honored and chosen

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to have witnessed one of life's greatest mysteries. Is there life after death? The answer lies in the gift. The answer lies in the whisper.

It is now up to us to share the gifts of faith, hope, and love with our world. As Mom and I experienced a glimpse of heaven that cold December night, we knew our lives would never be the same. Our experience was a genuine encounter with the Spirit of God and our calling is to share that light with our world.

Although my search for understanding and belonging had gone on long before, this story is the real beginning of my spiritual journey. Baptized a Roman Catholic as an infant, I searched long and hard for the meaning of Christianity and for understanding of the spiritual realm. I searched from church to church, from denomination to denomination trying to find the secret.

In my head I understood that God loved me and I believed in salvation. I longed for a connection that would be nourishing and purpose-driven. But there were so many choices. Catholics; Fundamentalists; Protestants... Who was right? The more I searched, the more confused I became. There are so many variations of belief, each with rules and

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regulations of their own. Which ones are man-made and which ones are scriptural? Which translation of the Bible delivers the authentic word? My faith was strong, but I was weary.

When I stood at the podium and shared my dad's story with those who attended his funeral, I knew I had found my answer. The answer lies in our relationship with our God and the people we meet in our lifetime as we recognize the little piece of divinity alive in each of our hearts. This revelation brought clarity to my search. All along I had the answer; it lies in living out a life filled with faith, hope, and love – in being present for those placed on our spiritual pathway.

That December morning in 1995, I was filled with joy as we celebrated a life that had transformed my world. Do I miss my Dad? More than anyone will ever know. But how can I be sad? Dad's whisper, "*They're here,*" has energized my soul and has assured me that I will see him again. We will be together forever in eternity, surrounded by the essence of the God we love so much.

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The poem, *God Hath Sent His Angel* by Grace Noll Crowell¹, beautifully summarizes our experience. I concluded Dad's eulogy with the reading of this great work of poetry. As I moved from the lectern, the following words resonated in the hearts of all present:

“An angel bent above him in the night
To strike his chains away and set him free.”

My Dad is no longer restricted by the pain of disease or limited by the restraints of this world. His chains have been lifted. He is free to love for all eternity. Love transcends time and space. To witness the evolution from one lifetime to the next has brought me such comfort. Dad's presence surrounds me daily. The connection of love binds together both our worlds.

“An angel bent above him in the night, to strike his chains away and set him free.” These words are engraved on my heart and will forever provide understanding of faith, hope, and love, with the greatest of these being Love.

¹ Crowell, Grace Noll. *God Hath Sent His Angel*: Compiled by Editors of Guideposts, 1993, p 38.

Chapter Two - Gentle Man

In the midst of fear and uncertainty, he waited...days passed... life grew fragile....a love so strong...a soul so eager to reunite, yet limited by human understanding....hesitation to journey forward... liberated by a single tear.

A few months after my Dad passed away I was in the midst of another routine day as Director of Operations for a senior home care agency. My morning schedule had me meeting with the daughter of a potential client who was currently in Hospice care.

The two of us sat at her kitchen table reviewing paperwork when she expressed a concern she had regarding her dad. It had been over a week since she brought him home from the hospital. The doctors expected he might only live a day or two. She wondered if her dad was afraid of dying. He was so frail she didn't understand why he was hanging on to life. I listened as she shared her concern, offering empathy and support.

Aware this was a short-term assignment, we agreed to start a caregiver the following day. Just a few hours a day

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would allow his daughter to run errands, get rest, and attend to the necessities of life.

She took me into the living room to meet her dad who rested comfortably in a hospital bed located in the center of the room. A credenza was placed at the foot of the bed with a picture of a woman positioned at eye level. Curtains covered the windows but the rest of the room appeared virtually sterile-like with bare walls and no other furniture. The woman in the picture was beautiful with a warm loving smile. A sense of honor and reverence appeared to surround her space.

As I watched this gentle man, somehow I knew that divine intervention had called me to this moment. I sensed that destiny had brought me here, and this meeting was part of my journey as well as his. I felt an emotional bond which led me to take hold of his hand, connecting us soul to soul. From this point forward I was aware of a spiritual presence and understood that God was in charge.

I asked him if the woman in the picture was his wife. With a smile he nodded, "Yes." I told him how beautiful she was and I commented on how much he must have loved her. He nodded as a single tear rolled down his cheek. I sensed a

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love beyond normal and a unity that few are blessed to share. As he looked at her picture, he said, “I am afraid heaven will be so crowded that I won’t be able to find her.”

With tears rolling down my face, I tenderly touched his hand. It was like touching the hand of Christ, that piece of divinity in each of our hearts, connecting us to the universal creator who gives us life. This moment took my breath away as I came to understand a love beyond intellectual comprehension.

I leaned toward him, my heart bursting with compassion and understanding and I asked if I could share a story with him. With his nod of approval, I shared my dad’s experience and how his mom and dad came to take him home. Looking into his eyes I said, “You don’t have to worry about finding your wife because she is waiting to meet you and to lead you home.” He softly touched my hand as tears rolled down his face releasing all fear and limits of human understanding. He whispered, “Thank you.”

We never placed a caregiver in his home. The reunion of this gentle man and his wife happened shortly after that transforming moment in time. Honestly I don’t

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even remember what he looked like, or his name, but I can still take myself back to that moment in time, and sense the touch of his hand. My life changed forever that day as I came to understand the tremendous healing power in love.

When I left his home I could not pull myself away. I sat in my car, in his driveway, for an unconsciously long time. I had just met Christ face-to-face. The presence... the love... the awareness was surreal. I was not ready to come back to this earthly plane.

As I journey forward I recognize a need to trust, allowing the Spirit to take the lead when I am called to these divine encounters. When I do, I am overwhelmed by God's amazing love. It is such a tremendous blessing to share God's light with our world, making a difference, one soul at a time.

The seed of faith planted in me as a child is blooming. Hope is bigger than I can still comprehend. Our perception is limited by the human mind, but each spiritual encounter takes us deeper into our own understanding. Time spent with this humble man may have been brief but he touched my heart forever. The spirit of Love in his heartfelt words,

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“I’m afraid heaven will be so crowded...” moved me beyond measure.

What a gift I found in his whisper, “Thank You.” No, *thank you* beautiful soul, for sharing with me the intimacy of Love. Yes for sure, the greatest of these is Love.

“An angel bent above him in the night, to strike his chains away and set him free.” Is this a line from a poem, or poetry in motion? To release the pain, the fear, the uncertainty that stands at death’s door, sets us free to love. Love never fails!

Chapter Three - Mary Helen

In the midst of loneliness... joy abounds...a welcoming spirit...a delightful soul... hallowed with remarkable memories...passionately embracing life and laughter...revealing purity of heart.

I was attracted to Mary Helen the instant I met her. She was one of those people whose spirit tugged at your heart strings. Mary Helen was eighty-nine years old when we met, filled with spunk and vitality. She loved life.

Scheduled for an introductory meeting, the message I received said she lived alone and needed someone to help with running errands and companionship. I knocked at her door and Mary Helen greeted me with the cheeriest, "Good Morning, please come in."

Dressed in her Sunday finest, as if about to go somewhere special, she directed me to her dining room table and invited me to take a seat. The table, set with precision and care was both pleasant and welcoming. A vase of fresh flowers arranged at the center, sat atop an elegant lace tablecloth. The intimate setting highlighted a lovely china teapot and two matching cups and saucers which awaited our company. Small plates, with two cookies apiece, and

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linen napkins completed each place setting. It became inevitable this consultation with Mary Helen would be no ordinary orientation meeting, and we were about to have a very special afternoon.

Within minutes of sitting together, sipping tea, I felt the spiritual connection. I sensed this was a pre-destined meeting with the spirit of intention and purpose again knocking at my door. Some people are brought into our lives for a lifetime and others for just one season, long enough to inspire growth as we journey forward. Mary Helen came as my season of joy! A true pleasure to be around, she absolutely enjoyed life to the fullest.

Our time together kindled in me a desire to find contentment in the present moment. Mary Helen did not allow loneliness to control her state of mind. She easily could have, but instead, embraced life and made the best of her situation—aligning her heart with whom-ever God sent her way. We sat at her table for hours, just talking and laughing. In fact, we never got around to talking about caregiver services. That required a second visit.

Wow, what a storyteller! She drew me in on every word. She mesmerized me. Mary Helen loved sharing tales

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of her younger days and memories which shaped the confident, precious woman she had become. Her favorite story, which I invited her to tell each time we were together, made me laugh so hard I cried.

Mary Helen grew up in an era when life was much simpler. Her family lived in a small town where her father served as mayor. Back then townspeople were like family. Her dad, as mayor, became the father figure for the entire town. He had a genuine spirit of joy, and a charisma much like the daughter he raised.

She told me the story of the time they built a new outhouse behind their home. Her father, so proud of the little house, invited the whole town to join them in celebration. Dressed up in their finest they assembled in the town square and paraded to the new outhouse location.

As the grand master of the parade, her dad led with plunger in hand, marching to the beat of the music. Oh yes, the local high school band took part in the festivities. In unison the family, band and townspeople marched through the streets until arriving at their destination, *the new outhouse*. Once there, they surrounded the wooden comfort station, saluting as her father pulled out the garden hose

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commencing with the initiation ceremony. Then she said, “Out came the food and drink and they partied all day, testing the function ability of the new structure. That is when the merriment began.”

This story might sound silly or trivial, but I wish you could have observed Mary Helen as she told the story, with sound effects and motions. You would understand... had you seen her face, or heard her laughter as she shared her fondest memory. She was pure joy in action. There is a great message behind her story, one which encourages us to step back and celebrate the little things in life. Each time I asked her to share her story, she gladly obliged, charming me with her special gift of embellishing the details.

Our friendship blossomed over the next year as she influenced an attitude of joy in my life. I loved our time together, until one day when I received a phone call informing me that Mary Helen was in the hospital. Sorrow filled my heart as I held her hand and watched her struggle for life.

I tried to cheer her up by telling her the *outhouse story*. Her face lit up as she managed a brief smile, still sparkling—even through the pain. I’m not sure if the story itself

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amused her, or if my attempt at embellishing the details made her smile. I know for sure, in that moment, peace and unconditional love surrounded us, joining our hearts together forever.

As I reflect on our final moment together I recognize how blessed we were to have connected and found such a beautiful friendship. Through a saddened heart, with tear-filled eyes I whispered, “Goodbye my friend, until we meet again.” In that moment, as we embraced, I felt purity of heart.

Psalm 126:2

We were filled with laughter,
and we sang for joy.

And the other nations said,
“What amazing things the LORD has done for them.”

The Lord has done amazing things indeed! We are meant to share the joys of life so others may experience the love of God. Mary Helen did that for me by just being herself, her genuine, honest, sincere, wonderful self. Isn't that what we are all called to do? To be comfortable and confident with whom we are, and to be present in one another's lives— sharing our uniqueness and giftedness.

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Being open and evoking the person we were created to be is where we find— peace, love and joy!

Less than a year after meeting Mary Helen, I had the privilege of saying a few words at her funeral. What a beloved gift she was to me. Born in June, our last celebration together was her ninetieth birthday. Oh, how she loved life, being ninety, and having lunch together. Mary Helen was in my life for a brief time, just one season, but she will live in my heart forever. I am so grateful for her presence in my life. We intimately connected; soul mates on a journey towards wholeness.

Aside from love, Mary Helen taught me many things. She taught me it is okay to use my fine china every day, and two cookies are all we need. I've realized that memories and love are all we can take with us as we journey forward into the kingdom. I've acquired a passion for the simple things in life and the ability to meet each person as if we were meeting Christ. Most important, she taught me to be joyous always. Mary Helen said, "There's always something to celebrate, if there is not— create it."

Mary Helen died in August at the end of the summer season. Summer brings with it sunshine, blossoms, fruits,

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vegetables, picnics, parades, ball games, gatherings and much celebration. How appropriate God called her home in the season of such abundance of life. I am sure as she met the God of her understanding—she heard the words, “Well done my good and faithful servant, you have spread much joy to my people.”

Journey on my dear friend until we meet again...

