the long winter * mental wellbeing * creativity * poetry
devotional * choosing brave * stories of hope
paint a cushion * explore, dream, discover * giveaways
books * playlist * soul food
Welcome to iola

This magazine is named iola because is a Greek girls name that means violet dawn, and a Welsh name meaning valued by the Lord.

Inspired by the verse in Romans 12 ‘being transformed by the renewing of your mind’. Looking for a name for the magazine I turned from words to names that meant renew, transform, revive and new life.

I loved the meaning of iola; violet dawn, especially thinking of the proverbs 31 woman who dresses her family in purple, the colour of royalty. iola is you dear reader; treasured by the Lord.

Abi & the Iola artists

Proverbs 31. Romans 12.
I dreamt up this magazine for you. If you love good design, creativity, reading and music, - iola is for you. If you’ve ever wondered about how to manage all the things: family, meaningful work, creative pursuits and how not to lose your self in the process, - iola is for you. If you have faith in God but at times might describe your relationship with him as complicated and have been hurt on life’s road, - iola is for you.

If your idea of a simple treat is some time out with coffee and a magazine that inspires not invokes envy - iola is for you.

With a focus on wellbeing, creativity, articles on parenting, life and relationships, cities to discover, a creative tutorial, beautiful scene photography, writing prompts and playlists, a devotional and a short story to read to your children, poetry, book introductions - iola is for you.

I’ve gathered a group of writing and creative friends to offer our best to encourage you along the path of living life well. We come from the US, Australia, Canada and the UK so you may notice some grammar and spelling differences but I hope you will notice more what we all hold in common with you. After all, we read to know we are not alone.
Artists who made iola for you

(in alphabetical order)

Abi Partridge is a creative, designer and writer living with her husband and three children in Oxfordshire, UK. She is passionate about encouraging others in creativity for their mental wellbeing, in finding their creative voice and making creative opportunities for busy women. She writes at abipartridge.com and posts on Instagram @abipartridge.

Amber Salhus is a wife, mom, blogger, house-flipper, comedy lover, and burgeoning farmer. She lives in the Oregon countryside with her husband, their two kids, and their ever-growing list of animals. She openly shares the adventures of dreaming big in the middle of motherhood, navigating the creative process, and finding the humor in all of it at ambersalhus.com.

Becky L. McCoy lives on the Connecticut coast with her two precocious and hilarious children. She once enjoyed teaching high school physics and now tells her story of loss, grief, and joyful living on her blog. Having struggled with depression and anxiety and experienced several seasons of grief and struggle, Becky is passionate about creating an online community where people share their stories and encourage one another to choose to live bravely and authentically through disappointment and discouragement. You can find Becky on all forms of social media @BeckyLMcCoy, on her blog at BeckyLMcCoy.com, and her podcast Sucker Punched.

If you would like to submit your articles, photos or more for the next edition of iola you can get your guide at abipartridge.com/iolamagazinesubmissions
Artists who made iola for you

(in alphabetical order)

Carly Thomson is a dynamic speaker, writer, author of tween-girl faith trilogy, Truth Seekers and young adult novel, The Freedom Sound. She is a teacher, a devotional writer, a contributor to faith magazines, devotionals and blog sites and is the founding director of She Collective. If Carly is not writing, you’ll find her playing, exploring and adventuring with her family OR completely lost in a good book with a cup of tea and a cookie.

CarlyThomson.com
The Perfect Recipe (a short story) p. 47
Truth Seekers (an excerpt from her new book) p.59

Charlotte is an evangelist at heart and she’s passionate about sharing the good news of God's love & hope with the world. She is a speaker & event facilitator who seeks to encourage others to find creative ways to share their own stories.

As a qualified nurse, she runs her own home care business, supporting people through the many changing seasons of their lives. She has 3 fantastic grown up children who she counts as friends and she lives in the beautiful Cotswolds UK with her equally fantastic husband!

www.livemovebe.org.uk
For those who live in a land of deep shadows. p. 43

Elli Johnson has been blogging at thehippochronicles.com for over 4 years. She writes about mental health, creativity, beauty and the chaos of family life. She is a professional child wrangler, (over)thinker, and tea drinker.

Elli lives in Liverpool with the river Mersey at the bottom of the road.
To find her newest and most exciting work, check out: patreon.com/thehippochronicles
Self care for when you are coming out of a time of depression. p.21
A benediction for fools. p.63
Elizabeth Duncan Stretar, (Cleveland, Ohio) is the mother of 8 married adults, grandmother to 16, and enjoys spending her empty-nest time with husband, Frank. She is a graduate of Fuller Theological Seminary (MACL), Young Life’s first national director and currently working as a major airline Flight Attendant. Stretar’s passion is to help others live an above and beyond kind of life, by encouraging them realize their untapped potential, discover their life-purpose that strives to make a difference in the lives of others.

She’s a published author of children’s book, Acorn Gert & Brother Bert (Halo Publishing, 2016) and blogs at Elizabeth Duncan Stretar: Above and Beyond Mid-life (betsy stretar.com)

Motherhood: one season of many. p.41

Janine Dilger is a Canadian writer who loves Jesus, her family, and a steaming mug of coffee in a quiet kitchen before the day begins. God wired her with an eye for beauty: nature, art, photography, design and words—these things whisper refreshment into her soul. She is as broken as they come and has way more questions than answers. But after a life’s worth of hard lessons, she is realizing the trick is to just keep her feet moving. To that end, she’s doing her best at navigating the twists and turns of this life with faith, hope and humour. You can Janine blogging about her journey at janinedilger.com

The Long Winter. p.15

Jody Collins is a vibrant speaker and retreat facilitator, and author of “Living the Season Well—Reclaiming Christmas.” Recently retired from over 20 years of teaching, she enjoys spending time with her children and grandchildren. Jody and her husband call the Seattle area home where she loves spending any extra time in the garden. You can find her writing weekly about faith/life discoveries at www.jodyleecollins.com.

Pressed into Joy. p.26
Artists who made iola for you

(in alphabetical order)

Kimberly Coyle is a freelance writer and an adjunct professor of writing with an MFA in creative non-fiction. She has written for publications such as In Touch Magazine, Fathom Magazine, (in)courage, and Grace Table. When not writing or teaching, she dabbles in photography and can be found on Instagram as @kacoyle.

She writes regularly online at www.kimberlyanncoyle.com.

Books for armchair traveller. p.51

Laura Thomas is a published Christian author with a heart for inspiring and encouraging readers of all ages. She is truly multi-genre - with a published Christian teen fiction trilogy, marriage book, children’s stories, devotionals for Union Gospel Press, her blog, and she now has a literary agent representing her Christian romantic suspense novel. Laura is English and Canadian, married to her high school sweetheart, mom of three, passionate about faith and family... and chocolate!

laurathomascuthor.com

Explore, Dream, Discover: Kelowna, BC, Canada. p.28

Libby John is a creative artist of many forms. As a singer/songwriter, she debuted her first EP in 2016 and her first album in Oct. 2017. Libby is also a choreographer who works for local universities and high school musicals and she teaches hip hop and modern dance classes. She has a passion to spur others on to be an influence on the culture through their faith & artistry which led her to create the podcast “Art & Faith Conversations”. Libby is a lover of small beginnings and finding beauty in the ordinary. She lives in St. Paul, Minnesota with her husband and 3 daughters.

Libby can be found sharing her creative journey and prayerful devotionals through songs at www.libbyjohnartandsong.org.

Giving thanks playlist. p.32
Niki Hardy is a Brit in the USA, a cancer survivor and pastor’s wife, a fresh air junkie and tea drinker. As a speaker and blogger her candid, humorous storytelling helps us find humor and grace in the darkest place, and learn to laugh and trust God when all we want to do is scream. When she’s not speaking, writing or running trails with her Doodles, she can be found trying to figure out which of the three remote controls actually turns the TV on.

You can find her, encouragement, and lots of practical resources at nikihardy.com.

I stole a bra! p. 23

Sarah E. Frazer writes and lives in a brick house at the end of Thomas Road with her husband, five kids, a cat, a dog, and five chickens. Motherhood is her calling but her passion is to inspire focus and encourage deep-rooted Bible study for the busy mom. Life is full of seasons, but every season can be made more peaceful when time is spent in God’s word. Join Sarah on her favorite social media space: Instagram. Or you can find her on her blog, www.sarafrazer.com.

God is in the whisper. p. 35

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## Giveaways
If you’re reading this magazine, then it’s safe to assume that on some level, you’re interested in the creative process. Maybe you fully identify as a Creative already, or maybe you’re reading this more as someone on the outside looking in, timidly curious about the creative life but certainly not existing in that realm yourself.

Or maybe you’re more like me—new to the party and still figuring out how to fit in.

For most of my life I genuinely believed that I wasn’t a creative person. I wasn’t even mad about it, really, I just always put “art” into a box, and when I didn’t see myself fitting into that box, I assumed I had no place in the Creative Club.

I can’t paint or draw or write a song. I don’t craft or invent or collect artsy things. I can’t even dance, unless you count car-dancing (which I do) because it only requires me to utilize half of my body at once: The upper half, which everyone knows is the easiest part. It’s the footwork that will trip you up (pun intended.)

Other than my inability to dance, I never minded much that I wasn’t “the creative type”. I have other passions. I love words on a page, interior design, gathering and encouraging women, I love to make people laugh and to look for the humor in every situation.

It wasn’t until a few years ago as I began noticing the things that make me come alive and intentionally moving towards them that it dawned on me that I was actually being creative.

I started blogging and realized that I could connect with women, encourage them, and even make them laugh, all through words on a page.

After 10 addresses in 12 years, my husband and I developed a passion and a skill for renovating and designing homes, and we quietly started a house-flipping business on the side.

These things had always come naturally to me but for the first time ever, I actually recognized them as my creative work.

With a sudden rush of panic and delight, I realized that I’d somehow snuck into the party, but I still wasn’t sure if I belonged.

The moment I found the courage to name my talents, dreams, and creative offerings, the voice of my inner critic grew loud, plaguing me with questions of, “Who do I think I am?” “Do I belong into this space?” “Is there room for me here?”

You see, it’s much easier to do your creative work when you’re not aware that you’re doing it. But the fact of the matter is that if you’re a living breathing human, you’re creative. And odds are, you’re already doing your creative work, whether you realize it or not.

That might look like tying on apron strings and making beautiful food, like bringing order to chaos within your home or on a spreadsheet, like the innate ability to make people feel welcome not just in your home but in your life, or a million other things.

Your art can be anything or nothing you expected, but it will always be what makes you come alive.
So often we overlook those things that come naturally to us because they come naturally to us.

But the second we name those things and get intentional with them is the second that Resistance will push back.

For some Resistance might look like comparison and insecurity. You bravely try something new and you’re immediately reminded of all the people who could do it better or who’ve already done it better.

For others Resistance might look like circumstance and timing. Maybe you’re in a season where your work feels more practical than creative. Maybe it looks like a day job that pays the bills, full time parenting, or both at the same time, and you find yourself in a limiting circumstance where “exploring your creativity” feels like a pipe dream. You secretly worry that the dreams and talents tucked away in your heart are forgotten on a shelf somewhere, collecting dust and losing relevance.

For others still, Resistance might look like confusion and uncertainty. Maybe you haven’t fully realized your gifts yet, or what your creative work looks like, much less how it fits into the middle of your right-now life. Maybe you’re the type who needs to know exactly where you’re going and precisely how you’ll get there before you’ll ever take one step.

The good news is that whatever Resistance looks like for you, it does not have to win.

If you find yourself in a season of limited time and opportunity, of confusion, or of feeling unqualified, take heart, because the thing about seasons is they always change. Whatever work you happen to be doing, trust that none of it is wasted and know there is always art you can make because you are always you.
Gratitude list
iola playlist

To be loved - Sara Groves
Beautiful Day - Nichole Nordeman
The Garden - Sara Groves
Listen to your life - Nichole Nordeman
Find you here - Ellie Holcomb
Suitcase - Al Halley
How could I ask for more - Charity North
You're the best song - Bethany Dillon
Playing the games - Al Halley
You're not forgotten - Libby Stohr
Every note matters - Nichole Nordeman
Take every step - Kristin Leever
You're gonna be ok - John O'Donnell
It’s still dark when she gets up. Laura feels it like a heavy blanket. The weight of it is oppressive. She’s methodical in her tasks: she finishes her coffee, gets the kids breakfast, makes lunches, and sends them out the door to the bus.

She knows there are e-mails to respond to, phone calls to return. She knows that if she gets dinner into the crockpot early, it will make life that much easier when the kids are home from school. But she goes back to bed instead. She thinks perhaps another hour of sleep is what she needs to get back on track.

Later, a friend invites her for coffee and she politely declines. The thought of doing her hair and makeup to go out is overwhelming. She dreads the prospect of putting on a smile and making small talk for an hour.

By the time the kids arrive home, shortly after 4 p.m., the sky is already dusky. Lights in the house blaze as dark falls by dinnertime. Her husband notices her lack of energy, her subdued responses; a silly child may elicit a smile, but not much more.

He asks about her day. She gives him a monotone, “Fine.” They are all the same.

Day after day, the story is the same. Does Laura’s story sound familiar?

It’s easy to ignore the warning signs of depression. Symptoms identified in isolation are easy to justify away. We tell ourselves, “It’s just PMS.” or “I had a bad night.” “It will get better.” “I just need to snap out of it.”

And while it’s very possible that low energy or a bad day is a one-time occurrence, sometimes it’s more pervasive than that. Seasonal Affective Disorder—also known as SAD or winter depression—if left unchecked, can have a devastating toll on individuals and families.

Regardless whether your low mood is circumstantial or something deeper, it’s important to know that you are not alone. In the UK alone, experts estimate one in 15 individuals are affected by SAD between the months of September and April, with women twice as likely to experience symptoms of depression than men. Despite much discussion about mental health in public spheres, many women simply don’t feel empowered to speak openly about their depression. There is a tendency to withdraw from relationships because we don’t want to be a burden, we think we can figure it out on our own, or it’s embarrassing to admit that we don’t have it all together.

And because of that, many aren’t finding the support they need, both in the community and in the church. Amy Simpson, author of *Troubled Minds: Mental Illness and the Church’s Mission,* writes, “There’s an assumption among many people that if they were honest about what they experienced, it would be rejected or they would be shamed.”

This rings true in light of a 2011 study on prescription usage in the US which revealed that one in four women in the US take some sort of prescribed medication to treat mental illness—that’s 12 million women. And yet, a large percentage of those are still not talking about their issues.
An enlightening 2015 Christianity Today article titled, Depression: The Church’s Best Kept Secret, shines a spotlight on the lack of support that generally exists in the church regarding mental health.

In the article, Dr. Archibald Hart, a licensed psychologist and senior professor of psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary, recalls asking a room full of women attending a seminar on depression, “How many of you are on an antidepressant but have not told your husband?” At least half of them stood up, he says.

Clearly, the church has a long road ahead toward dispelling the stigma of mental illness but that doesn’t mean there isn’t help and support available right now. If you think you may be suffering from SAD, an important first step is to reach out to a trusted friend or family member. **Knowing that there is one person who sees you and knows what you’re going through can be a literal lifesaver.**

Scripture reveals that depression has actually been part of the human experience for a long time. But it can be easy for well-versed believers to gloss over the passages because they make us uncomfortable or, on the surface, they seem irrelevant.

Hannah was “reduced to tears and would not even eat. . . . [She] was in deep anguish, crying bitterly as she prayed to the Lord.” (1 Samuel 1:7, 10)

Elijah asked God to take his life. (1 Kings 19:4)

Job described his life as ebbing away. “Depression haunts my days,” he said. “At night my bones are filled with pain, which gnaws at me relentlessly” (Job 30:16–17).

The human condition is not a surprise to God. There are real physiological changes that occur in the brain when depression begins to take hold. If a loved one had a broken leg, you wouldn’t hesitate to seek medical help. By the same token, depression should not be minimized as something that will pass.
What exactly is Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)?

SAD is a specifier—or subtype—of major depression. People with this type of disorder commonly experience symptoms during the fall and winter months. During the lighter and warmer spring and summer months, the depression often goes into remission.

Though researchers haven’t pinpointed the specific cause of SAD, we do know that several factors may come into play:

The reduced level of sunlight in fall and winter may cause winter-onset SAD. This decrease in sunlight may disrupt your body’s internal clock and circadian rhythms, leading to feelings of depression.

Reduced sunlight may cause a drop in serotonin, a brain chemical (neurotransmitter) that affects mood, which may trigger depression.

The change in season can also disrupt the balance of the body’s level of melatonin, which plays a role in sleep patterns and mood.

SAD appears to be more common among people who live far north or far south of the equator.

This may be due to decreased sunlight during the winter or, conversely, unnaturally long days during the summer, which impacts the internal body clock.

If you are suffering from SAD, there are a number of things you can do to change the trajectory of your mental health. First of all, talk to your doctor, he or she can help rule out any other possible causes for your symptoms, such as thyroid problems.

What are some of the signs and symptoms of SAD?

Not everyone will experience all the symptoms listed, but if more than one of these resonate with you, you might want to consider looking into some treatment options.

* Sleep problems - usually oversleeping and difficulty staying awake but in some cases disturbed sleep and early morning waking
* Lethargy - lacking in energy and unable to carry out normal routine due to fatigue. Heaviness in the arms and legs
* Overeating - craving for carbohydrates and sweet foods, which usually leads to weight gain
* Depression - feeling sad, low and weepy, a failure, sometimes hopeless and despairing
* Apathy - loss of motivation and ability to concentrate
* Social problems - irritability and withdrawal from social situations, not wanting to see friends
* Anxiety - feeling tense and unable to cope with stress
* Loss of interest in normally pleasurable activities
* Loss of libido - decreased interest in sex and physical contact
* Weakened immune system - vulnerability to catching winter colds and flu
* Mood changes - for some people bursts of over-activity and cheerfulness (known as hypo-mania) in spring and autumn.
Common treatments for SAD include:

**Light therapy.**
Daily exposure to a special light for roughly 30 minutes has proven very effective. The light mimics natural sunlight and can affect brain chemicals that improve mood and relieve symptoms. Sixty to 80 per cent of people with SAD find significant relief from light therapy. Make sure you talk to a medical professional about obtaining the right type of lamp.

**Medication.**
If symptoms are particularly intense, medication might be the best course of treatment. Different kinds of medications work in different ways, so it’s important to discuss with your doctor which is the right type for you.

**Counselling (or Talk Therapy).**
Working with a counsellor can be very effective in identifying possible triggers for depression, as well as teaching skills to help break negative patterns associated with depression. Altering thoughts, attitudes, and actions that perpetuate negative patterns is instrumental in bringing about change. Counselling has proven to be beneficial alongside other treatments and medication.

**Self-care.**
Low energy and mood often means that there are only so many resources to go around. And, for many women, these are often spent on kids and family, which leaves very little left for self-care. The Catch 22 is that regular exercise, a healthy diet, good sleep habits, managing stress and staying connected to others are all an important part of navigating SAD in one piece. A good church community can also come alongside if they recognize the wisdom in encouraging these things along with meditation, prayer, and Scripture contemplation.

According to Dr. Hart, “there’s a healthy and healing synchronization that occurs when we realize that our bodies, emotions, and beliefs aren’t separate entities but all play an integrated role in shaping who we are. While the condition of our faith may not play a role in the onset of depression, it is certainly vital in treating it.”

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1 https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/s/seasonal-affective-disorder-sad
2 http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/women-and-prescription-drug-use_n_1098023
What does the Bible say about Hope?

“I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33 NLT)

“You, LORD, are my lamp; the LORD turns my darkness into light.” (2 Samuel 22:29)

“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10)

“I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD.” (Psalm 40:1–3)

“But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” (Isaiah 40:31)

“He heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds.” (Psalm 147:3)
On either side of my driveway crocuses and snowdrops have started to appear. They have forced their way through the decomposing leaves. Bursts of colour against the damp brown matting. I take a rake and gently pull it across the flowerbed, easing my way through the flowers carefully, trying not to knock off the delicate blooms. The flowers I expose are top heavy, their stems are white, translucent, anaemic. Many of them flop forward, unable to support their own weight. I fear my zeal might have shortened their already brief life. I recognise myself here.

I have been re-learning how to live in a way that enables me to be well, to enjoy my days and weeks without the constant threat of sliding under. Figuring out what I need to do to make sure I don’t fall foul of the beast that is anxiety... again.

I have pushed through. I have worked my way into a new place, out of the dark. And now I am here in the sunlight. I feel disoriented, sun-blinded, unstable. I fear my legs will not continue to hold me as I venture forward. I am top heavy with new ideas, new habits, new ways to be.

This new life I am discovering has involved a complete overhaul of my priorities, how I spend my time, who I spend time with, how I treat my body.

Everything has had to change. And change at such a rapid rate (okay so I’ve been on this path for over seven years – but that is pretty quick to change your whole life) can leave you vulnerable, exposed, it can tire you out.

To ensure I grow in a way that promotes strength and enables longevity I have put some things in place to protect me. To act as a safety net while I am venturing forward.

Scheduled rest.

Constant activity was one of the pillars of my old way of life. Busyness was seen as a status symbol and any rest was treated as an unnecessary luxury.

I need rest now. Rest to enable me to remember how to live in this new way, and rest as part of the new life. Rest in the rhythm and routine of my days and weeks.

I look at my diary and schedule in time for nothing, for having a bath or watching trashy tv, for playing board games and walking by the river. Rest and renewal is an essential part of growth and forward motion. And I have learnt it only happens when I schedule it.

Surrounding myself with grace-speakers.

I make sure I spend time every week with people who will remind me of the new things I have learnt. People who will prompt me to let myself off the hook, to have compassion towards myself, to cultivate a life of present attention, not future obsession. These ideas are still new to me. I can easily begin to lose them in the hustle of the everyday.
I have made new friends, and new ways to be with old friends, to ensure I am surrounded by people who will remind me my worth is not determined by my productivity or achievement, people who won’t let me forget the truths I have learnt the hard way.

Remembering rule number 6.

As decreed by Benjamin and Rosamund Zander* rule number 6 is: Don’t take yourself so goddamn seriously.

Blimey, all this talk of mental health and self-compassion can get a bit serious. Learning to laugh at myself is important, no – vital. (Ask my husband).

In the process of changing my life and learning how to live again I am going to make mistakes. This is a fact.

I am going to do too much and burn out, and I am going to go to the other extreme and find I have become a little too hooked on soap operas. I am going to say the wrong thing. I am going to take two steps forward and three steps back. I am going to make a fool of myself.

But it’s all good.

No one ever learnt anything new with an unbroken record of success. It takes failure and mistakes too.

Not taking yourself too seriously is a necessity when you spend your days talking about mental wellbeing and depression-busting strategies. (My children are very good at making sure I don’t forget this!)

*From The Art of Possibility by Benjamin and Rosamund Zander, an excellent read.
I stole a bra!

by Niki Hardy

I did, I really did, and it wasn’t even a sexy one.

Let me explain.

I’d been out to lunch with a girlfriend and our laughter and chatter hadn’t stopped for a moment. The modern, deconstructed menu challenged my taste buds, and our conversation stirred my emotions – she was going through a rough spell and I couldn’t fix it.

We paid our bill and decided to spend the precious minutes before school was out and our kids needed us home, meandering the smorgasbord of new shops that had sprung up in the area.

The sun was out ... the sky was blue... the shops were open ...

All was calm and as it should be on a girl’s lunch out, until I screamed, “Aaaaaaahhhhhhhhh!! I’ve stolen a bra!”

I’d left the first boutique empty handed and as I grabbed the handle of our next fashion emporium, eager to find something more my style, I noticed a rather ugly bra dangling not-so-innocently from my wrist.

“I stole a bra, oh my goodness, I stole a bra!”

Immediately, I spun on my heels, waving the snow-white undergarment above my head, determined to confess and surrender to my fate. Peering around her shop door, the store owner’s confused expression said it all ...

“Did this middle-aged English woman really walk out of my store, wearing a rather unsexy brassière slung over her wrist like a Kate Spade clutch?”

To which the answer was, most decidedly, YES! Yes she did!

With a thousand apologies spewing from my lips, in my humblest English accent (I’ve found a good Downton Abbey accent gets me out of the stickiest situations), I paid for the bra and left - embarrassed and contrite.

She had silently watched me pick up the bra, turn to my friend to exclaim that I’d been looking for one just like it (yes, I wear unattractive underwear ... for comfort!), sling it nonchalantly over my wrist to buy later, get distracted by the shiny objects in the jewelry area, and then absent-mindedly turn to leave; completely unaware I was still carrying the underwear I’d so admired for its practicality and comfort!

Her grace, humor, and understanding kept me out of jail and in a slightly heady, I-can’t-believe-I-just-did—that kind of mood for the rest of the day. I had the clear sense I’d dodged a bullet, or at least an awkward conversation with my teenagers about underwear, policemen, and the dangers of mixing the two.

But as the day wore on, my relief turned to reflection as God nudged me to think about the day’s events and the allegorical connection between my lingerie thieving and my tendency towards emotional kleptomania.

“How much emotional baggage, invisibly slung over your wrist, are you carrying around with you?” He asked.

Whoa! He had me there!

As I looked at myself, I saw myself tired and exhausted from carrying the weight of emotions and beliefs I’ve refused to put down over the years. There were slightly hippy
looking hurts from growing up in
the 70's swinging next to beliefs
from the 80's still lurid in their
neon ra-ra skirts. Work related
resentments, deep unforgiveness
from failed relationships, and ugly
self-beliefs, all tumbling down
my arm like thrift store rejects.

“I’m not good enough.”
“I can’t forgive him”
“You’ll leave me.”
And so the list went on
... and on ... and on!
Boy do I have some spring
cleaning ahead of me!!

Thankfully, just like the shop-keeper, God’s grace and humor
prevail, and like the shop-keeper, He knows I didn’t mean to pick up
all that emotional detritus along
the bumpy road of life. He knows
it weighs me down and gets me
into trouble, and He knows just
how to help me put it down.
He forgives me.

He heals and comforts me.
The one BIG difference between
my new favorite shop owner and
God, is that He paid for me. I don’t
owe a thing. Nada. Zip. Zero. All
I have to do is put this baggage
down, let go, and walk away.

Of course that’s easier said than
done, but I know it’s worth it.

So, that’s how God spoke to a
dippy, middle aged woman,
through a very unattractive piece
of underwear, about how to lay
down her emotional baggage! Wow.
I guess He meant it when He said,
“For my thoughts are not
your thoughts, neither are
your ways my ways,” declares
the LORD. Isaiah 55:8

I love His sense of humor!

Download free 5 simple steps
to trusting God guide from
Niki Hardy at nikihardy.com
At the end of every day, I collapse onto the couch and make the most of my evening with Netflix and a glass of wine or warm cookies or salty, buttered popcorn, glad to waste brain cells and time until I crawl into bed and fall asleep.

My husband died three years ago, when my son was two years old and I was still pregnant with my daughter; being a single mom is the hardest thing I’ve ever done.

Quite often when someone finds out I’m a widow, the conversation comes to a grinding halt. I watch as their eyes glaze over and they enter the foggy land of “what on earth do I talk to her about when my hard stuff could never compare to being a single parent of young children, grieving the loss of a partner?” I really wish we would stop comparing hard stuff; the challenges you face in life are daunting for you, just as mine are for me, and nothing gets any easier when we insist on making life the saddest type of competition.

In the last five years, I’ve lost my dad and my husband, given birth to two children, and learned to live with my chronic anxiety and depression. It has been incredibly challenging and tremendously rewarding. I have learned what it means to live bravely.

Ten years ago, if you asked me what it meant to live a brave life, I would have described something along the lines of giving up worldly possessions to live in the deepest, darkest jungles like the Swiss Family Robinson. Or to join an elite military squad, risking my life just to do my job. Or to escape a human trafficking or other abusive situation. But I never would have used the word brave to describe what happens after a loved one dies. I never would have said it’s brave to keep living.

As I explore what it means to practice courage, I realize that brave and heroic are not the same thing. Parenting my children when I’ve lost the person I built a family with is brave. Getting through my daily routine when I’m in a brutal depressive spell is brave. Breathing through a panic attack and remembering it will end is brave. Celebrating another life milestone without my dad or my husband to cheer me on is brave.

Going food shopping when we could have cereal for dinner, but we’ve already done that for a few days is brave. Maybe not, but that last one sure feels like a giant accomplishment.

Grief and anxiety pull my thoughts towards the past and depression makes survival seem impossible. But I’m learning to dream again because loss and mental illness don’t mean my life is over. There are more good things to come. Dreaming and hoping are brave.

Anyone can be brave. Courage doesn’t require an extra chromosome or special coursework. It simply (but not easily) requires the choice to be brave. Maybe your brave thing is to keep putting one foot in front of the other. Maybe you need to say no to something. Or say yes. Brave can be admitting life is hard, but choosing not to give in. Or acknowledging the broken parts of your heart and pursuing healing.

I wasn’t born brave and neither were you, but we can choose to live bravely, together.
Pressed into Joy

Jody Lee Colley

Golden oil in
a bottle
d'alm

Liquid light
refracting sun
in shimmers

Mirrored shape
shines on the surface
of empty shelves.

I wonder
at the slow
drop, drop, drops

Diamonds as they
drip, drip, drip
down.

Joy tastes like
sunshine from
crushed, pressed life

leaving light.
Explore, Dream, Discover: Kelowna, BC, Canada

words & photos by Laura Thomas

“As much as I adore traveling, the thought of coming home always sets my soul at ease, causes me to exhale, fills my heart. Comfortable yet captivating, the city of Kelowna in British Columbia has been our home for twenty-three years and its natural beauty still takes my breath away on a daily basis!

In 1995, my husband and I packed up our two-year-old daughter and embarked on the audacious adventure of emigrating from the UK to Canada. After arriving in Vancouver on the west coast, my husband had a job interview in a picturesque city about four hours inland, nestled in the Okanagan Valley. We knew absolutely nothing about this Kelowna, but as the April sun glistened on a cobalt lake surrounded by welcoming snow-tipped mountains, it took us all of three seconds to decide this was where we wanted to settle and raise our family!

Kelowna, with its current population sitting at 127,500 has also become the vacation destination for our British family and friends time and again, and we have the privilege of proudly showing off the many attributes of our city. One of my most cherished aspects of living here is that we thoroughly enjoy all four seasons. And at the start of each one, I proclaim it my favorite—until the next season rolls around...

SUMMERTIME is pure perfection here, unless you dislike copious amounts of warm sunshine and idyllic leisurely lake-living. The climate is actually semi-desert (who knew that was a thing in Canada?) and therefore much free time is spent boating, swimming, sailing, water-skiing, or windsurfing on the expansive 84-mile length of the Okanagan Lake. We are famous for our bounty of local fresh fruit, which can be found at markets and fruit stands, and there’s nothing quite like an evening stroll along the downtown boardwalk watching the sunset, followed by some delicious dining lakeside.
The crisp FALL air is a welcome break from the heat, and a perfect time to take in a winery tour at one of over forty local wineries. From intimate family operated to larger facilities with first-class restaurants and stellar lake views, it’s worth taking time to peruse and sample some of our national and international award-winning wines. You won’t be disappointed!

If you’re looking for a WINTER wonderland experience, Kelowna has it all. A short winter season compared to much of Canada, we usually have ourselves a very merry white Christmas, which as a Brit, I thoroughly appreciate. If some serious snow sports or even après-ski activities are desired, the world renowned Big White Resort is less than an hour out of town, where the ski-in ski-out village also offers shopping and dining for those not downhill or cross-country skiing, snow-shoeing, snowmobiling, tubing, or doing any other snow-ish activity!

When SPRING is in the air in Kelowna, there is a definite spring in the step of the locals. With snow behind us and sunshine ahead, the air is fresh and the orchards heavy with glorious blossom. Perhaps the perfect opportunity for some hiking or biking at one of the numerous trails.

Parks, waterfalls, mountains, or railway trestles—every age and agility level is catered for.

Whether you take advantage of our numerous golf courses, enjoy wandering around our Cultural District downtown, checking out galleries, theatres, unique shops, and fine dining, or prefer an action-packed adventure on the lake or up the mountain—Kelowna truly has something for everyone. It’s been the perfect place to raise our three kids to adulthood, and we are in absolutely no hurry to ever move from this stunning little gem in the vast, spectacular country of Canada.

Here in Kelowna, I happen to believe there’s always more to explore, dream, and discover.

“Twenty years from now, you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn’t do than the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.” Mark Twain

**GIVEAWAY**

We have a copy of “Pearls for the bride” A non-fiction for newly weds by Laura Thomas to give away. See page 67.
Laura’s fave five!

**Restaurant:** Bouchons
with its intimate atmosphere & delectable French cuisine.
my mouth is watering merely thinking about it!

**Scenic drive:** to Sun-Oka in Summerland
well worth the 40 minutes to this beautiful sandy beach.

**Winery:** Mission Hill Winery
take a tour at this gorgeous
winery overlooking the lake an experience not to be missed!

**Shops:** Pannosy Village
an eclectic mix of unique boutiques & cozy cafes.

**Beach:** Sarsons
holding so many memories with my kids through the years, it’s a small family beach and I can walk there from my house.
Give thanks playlist

1. "Praise to the Lord"-Sara Groves
2. "Rejoice"-Andrew Peterson
3. "Oh Our Lord"-All Sons & Daughters
4. "Psalm 121"-Libby John
5. "Praise the King/Amazing Grace"-Cindy Morgan
6. "Look Upon the Lord"-Kari Jobe
7. "Be Still My Soul"-Salt of the Sound
8. "Our God Alone"-The Brilliance
9. "No One Else"-Enter the Worship Circle
10. "Yes and Amen"-Chris Tomlin
On having a heart of thanksgiving

by Libby John

Psalm 100
Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.
Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good and his love endures forever, his faithfulness continues through all generations.

In the hustle and bustle of life, shouting for joy to the Lord doesn’t feel like it comes naturally. Entering his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise can seem like a strange concept in our fast paced world and busy lifestyles. How is this shouting and joyfulness supposed to fit in to our daily lives? Thanksgiving, however, is vital to our relationship with God and was designed to be our lifeline. It is not merely a word of gratitude but true thanksgiving is our spirit agreeing with all who God says He is. It is our need and God’s supply lining up perfectly. This is what we were created for. Our hearts align with His when we come before Him joyfully. When we worship Him with gladness no matter what comes our way, then we are able to take advantage of our circumstances rather than our circumstances taking advantage of us.

Our default mode can be anxiety, worry, fear, anger or frustration because of our situations and oftentimes those things become greater than Christ in us. However, when we intentionally fill up with thanksgiving, then it begins to rise up out of us. As it rises up out of us, it leaves little room for the overwhelm of negativity. It doesn't mean all the problems go away but rather, they are put in their proper place. They are no longer shackles that hold us prisoner. When we worship with gladness, it is the ultimate form of engagement with God and we are set free from the lies that bind us. All else fades away when we come before Him with thanksgiving until it is only us and Him left. It is there where our hearts are able to receive the revelation of knowing He is the Lord our God.

This portal to our hearts to receive allows faith to rise up in us and we can experience the revelation of how wide and high and deep His love is and always has been for us. His perfect love is what drives out the fear, the anxiety, worry, anger or frustrations about our life’s situation. Be intentional and ready to give thanks. I’ve created a playlist to help do exactly that. Take some time to come before Him with joyful songs. Do not hesitate to give thanks to the Lord for He is good and His love endures forever. Know He is the Lord your God and you are His.
Elijah, prophet and speaker for God, had just come from the mountain top – literally and figuratively. He had defeated the prophets of Baal in a dramatic display of fire and power on the Mount of Carmel. A declaration of God and His true power was on display for all of Israel to see. In the next chapter we find our prophet, not on the mountain top revelling in the victory, but in the valley. Under a tree. Depressed and sad. Feeling alone. In fact, he wanted to do. He thought he had found God, there on the mountain. On the mountain Elijah experienced a miraculous victory. God revealed His awesome power by consuming Elijah's sacrifice, soaked in water, with a burning fire straight from the sky. ÅElijah surely thought: God is here. So when his life was threatened by a jealous and evil queen, he didn't respond in triumph, he ran.

After this, Elijah found himself in the valley. Literally, Elijah fled to an isolated place with no water or food. It was an empty place, and he wished to die. I was surprised the first time I saw those words, but the great prophet of God spoke to God: “O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.” The lowest a human can reach. To want to die is a deepest darkest pit, no one should experience. Yet so many do.

Are you in this pit? Read on to find how God meets Elijah here in the depths of his heartache....

God sends an angel. Not to give him a “pep talk” or a reprimand. God gives Elijah food. And sleep. I find it extremely comforting knowing God knew the physical strain depression an take on a body. Sleep is often the first thing to evade us when we suffer from darkness. God provided sleeps and food for Elijah. Then He asked Elijah to go into the wilderness. It was time Elijah separated himself from his job, his friends, and his people. He already felt alone, but God was bringing him to a place where he was really alone.

So think about this with me: Elijah had been given a miraculous victory, then plunged deep in the depths of despair. An exchange happens between Elijah and God after all of that:

God: What are you doing here, Elijah?

Elijah: I have been very zealous for the Lord God of Hosts, but the Israelites have abandoned Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are looking for me to take my life.

God: Go out and stand on the mountain in the Lord’s presence.

The next few verses is where we see where God is. Is He in the mountains? The valleys?

And he said, “Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord.” And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake:

And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. I Kings 19:11-12 (KJV)
A “still small voice” can also be translated, “a soft whisper. God is in the whisper.

What does God tell Elijah? After all of that, the victory, the depression, the wilderness, the show of God’s power, God’s message to Elijah is the same message He has for us:
You are not alone. And God still had work for Elijah. The close of I Kings tells how Elijah went back to work, and then (don’t miss this!!) he found Elisha. Here is what Elisha did for Elijah:

Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him. I Kings 19:21

Find God the of the glorious ordinary and walk the road of life leaning onto each other. God didn’t leave Elijah, and to show it, God sent Elisha – a friend – to comfort and walk with him. When Jesus calls us to abide with Him, He doesn’t just mean in the hardest days, but in mundane messy days.

What mess are you facing today? How can God meet you here, in the middle of the mess?

Does hardship weigh heavy on your heart? How can you hear God’s whisper in the night?

Are you feeling alone and forgotten by everyone, even God? How can you reach out to someone today?

Our God isn’t in the wind.
Our God isn’t in thunder and lightening.
Our God isn’t found in the majestic, but the mundane.

During the raging storm, He is both the waves and lighthouse. During our times of immense grief, He sits with us in the darkness, growing and molding us. During the hardest times of our lives, if we have seen His hand in the faithful small days, we can find Him in the darkness.

We want God to be grand and big (and He is), but more and more I’ve been seeing God in the ordinary days. He is a whisper in the middle of the night. He is the quiet when I choose to be still in prayer. He is in the way the sun shines though the trees. He is in the laughter. He is in the faithfulness of the oldest saint in church who prayers. He is in the last leaf, hanging onto the tree.

It is ingrained in us that we have to do exceptional things for God, but we do not. We have to be exceptional in the ordinary things of life, and holy on the ordinary streets, among ordinary people and this is not learned in five minutes. - Oswald Chambers

GIVEAWAY

We have a copy of “The Glorious Ordinary An invitation to study God’s word in your everyday life.” by Sarah E. Frazer. to give away, see page 67.
God is in the whisper
Write a letter of thanks to someone who has had a significant impact on your life.
At age 32, I gave birth to the last of my eight children.

I can honestly say there is nothing I have loved more, than being a mother.

But like most moms, I did not always love everything that came with it.

For me, laundry was one of those things I dreaded most.

I can laugh about it today, but my most memorable pathetic mom moment was the day my husband found me crying in twenty+ loads of laundry.

He most-likely interpreted my pathetic-mom-moment as a desperate-mom-moment.

So being the macho coach that he was (and still is) he took action and went for the game-winning point.

He helped me up and said, “I need to get you out of here.” “I don’t think there’s anything more life giving to a worn-out and wrung-out Mom, than the gift of time.”

I packed my weekend bag, got in my car, and drove to a bed and breakfast about an hour away from our home.

It was an unexpected gift that my soul desperately needed.

And although a get-away is wonderfully helpful, the reality is that the mundane is where we live most of our parenting days.

What I wish someone would have said to me during those early years are these three things:

1. Hang in there, Momma! This is but one season of many.
2. Be careful that you don’t neglect your own soul while caring for everyone else’s.
3. Don’t you know that you are more than a mom?

As a young mom, the days are long indeed when you’re knee deep in mounds of laundry and other daily demands. There seems to be little time left to do anything else.

I remember thinking “someday” my creative “other” life will return to me.

In my mind’s eye, I envisioned a carved wooden sign sitting on a shelf, high out of reach, gathering dust that read:

**my life**

“One day.” I thought, “I will be able to bring her back down, dust her off, and help her get back to doing those things she never had time to do.”

But that day seemed far off in the distance future. I was a restless creative and I felt as though I was neglecting her. I wanted to do other things beside laundry and cooking and cleaning.

In the life of a mother, every mundane moment counts.

And because it counts, it’s imperative that we make sure we are giving from a full cup and not an empty one.

**One Season of Many**

**Care for Your Soul**

One thing that saddens me greatly is the number of women who struggle with their personal identity and worth.

By the time their children leave home, they don’t know who they...
are or what their purpose in life is because they neglected the whole person God made them to be. I so appreciated the act of kindness my husband showed me that day in my laundry room. But there were many days when relief could not be found.

I’m thankful for my mentor friend, Andrea, who encouraged me to create space in my life to do those things I enjoy.

It’s not a matter of finding time, it’s a matter of making time in our lives to do those things that God wired us to do, caring for your soul is a gift you not only give to yourselves, but to your entire family.

Our children (and husbands) deserve healthy, balanced moms (and wives) who give from a full cup, not an empty one.

As women, we must discover what that balance looks like in our lives so that even in the mundane, we find joy, and fulfillment, and purpose.

You’re more than a Mom!

May I gently remind you? You are more than a mom!

You were designed to glorify God with the gifts he has entrusted to you. There are things hiding inside you that must come out because that’s the way God wired you.

Find a way in your hustle and bustle momma life, to feed the part of your soul that makes you come alive. Don’t do it at the expense of your family – do it around your family. Make it a priority because it will help you be a better mom and it will help you prepare for your empty nest life after kids.

My life was not on a shelf... this was my life. I needed to learn how to become more of who God made me to be in the mundane of everyday motherhood.

What about you lovely lady? You... who stand right there in the thick of it and persevering in the mundane of it. How will you become more of your true self in the midst of the mundane of motherhood?
For those who live in a land of deep shadows

by Charlotte Osborn

Having been a school nurse for a number of years, I was well aware of the increasing rise in the number of children and teenagers struggling with incredibly complex mental health issues.

However, I was totally unprepared when we found ourselves facing this issue within our own family.

I remember the feelings of total helplessness when I was called into school because my own precious child had caused physical damage to themselves through extreme self-harm.

I felt that somehow, I’d failed as a parent. How could I, as a trained nurse, have missed this? We had known that they were struggling with some issues, but we had put it down to hormonal teenage mood swings.

I felt that somehow, I’d failed as a parent. How could I, as a trained nurse, have missed this? We had known that they were struggling with some issues, but we had put it down to hormonal teenage mood swings.

Having not experienced any mental health issues myself, I struggled to really understand how my child was feeling. I had prided myself on having a good relationship with all our children and being a family who could talk openly and share our problems. Yet during this time, I felt totally unable to reach my child.

They were completely trapped in a dark prison of despair and isolation and I was powerless to help them.

In their desperate search for a way out, their behaviour and life choices became very destructive and caused us all more heartache and sadness.

We spent many hours at difficult doctors’ appointments and counselling sessions, but nothing seemed to be changing. To my shame, I often resorted to angry outbursts and very unhelpful comments and suggestions. My frustration was overwhelming as I grappled with my desire to ‘fix’ them.

Out of protection and care for them, we found ourselves carrying a huge burden which we were only able to share with a very few people. However, our family and close friends really did an amazing job of consistently standing with us and supporting us during the darkest days.

Living with someone who is battling mental health issues really does affect the whole family. We felt like we were walking through a minefield every day. The pressure on us all was exhausting, as we never knew what might happen next.

I went through a range of emotions each day as I faced the reality of our home life.

Ultimately, I was angry and frustrated at God. We had read all the ‘right’ Christian parenting books and followed their advice as we had brought up our kids. This was not part of the plan and it wasn’t fair. I ranted and railed against God; why us, why my family, and ultimately, why me?

Although I had been a Christian since my childhood, what I really wanted from God was this;

'It means no worries
For the rest of your days
It’s our problem-free philosophy Hakuna Matata!….
(The Lion King 1994)

However, I was finding following Jesus didn’t mean that our lives were a fairy tale story. In fact, Jesus said that we will all encounter the storms of life as we journey through it.
‘In this life you will have trouble, but take heart, for I have overcome the world.’
John 16 v33

I had read these words, spoken by Jesus to his disciples many times over the years. But it was only during this time, I felt that I came to understand what they really meant.

In the times when I felt I was losing faith in my heart, I discovered a greater depth of God’s love and He met me in my brokenness and pain.

He was and is my Saviour. He healed my heart and He gave me new hope and strength to face another day.

It was during this time that we first heard about Karis house.

This amazing place was to be part of God’s healing for our precious child.

The God centred holistic Xchange programme at Karis house combines counselling and prayer ministry alongside medical care & practical support.

God gives us this promise from these words of truth in Isaiah 9:

‘The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.
For those who lived in a land of deep shadows—light!
Sunbursts of light!’
The Message.

God broke into the land of darkness and shadows where our child was trapped.

His light shone and we saw a miracle happen—our child who had been paralysed by fear and despair was released into a new freedom towards health and wholeness.

Our family journey continues; often the roads can be unfamiliar and at times very hard to navigate. My story is that we never have to face it alone; regardless of how difficult the path.

Jesus is the light of the world and His love can reach us wherever we are no matter how dark it is.

www.karishouse.co.uk
As for me & my house we will serve the Lord
Hi, my name is Tom and do I have a perfect recipe for all who have been picked on or treated unfairly by a teacher?! It’s not just any old recipe; it’s one that really works. It’s a recipe that helped my best friend Frank, the under rated genius and myself, the champion practical joker get even with old Mrs Hanger. She was the crankiest, Meanest, Ugliest And most unfair teacher of them all.

All you need for this recipe is 1 whoopee cushion 1 dead mouse 1 handful of wriggling worms.

Then mix it all together with; 1 underrated genius 1 champion practical joker AND some very sneaky shoes.

Presto! The perfect recipe! How do I know it works you ask? Just keep reading and you’ll see.

It all began one very long lunchtime detention, when Frank and I were kept in for the fifth time this week – for no good reason that we could think of. The class was enjoying our version of the Australian settlement more than reading the boring story she wanted us to read. We were just trying to make reading more fun by adding our own story line and fun words. You know like, ‘fart’ or ‘bottom burp.’

I really do think they farted back then, just sayin’. I believe we were simply drawing from truth that her history book did not reveal...

Why we had those convicts and Aboriginal people joining forces to combat the soldiers. They would have won but Mrs Hanger rudely interrupted... Anyway, we decided it was the last time Mrs Hanger was going to keep us in unfairly. So we began to plan a way to get rid of her... For good...

As Mrs Hanger sat in her chair and said, “Good morning claaaa—” “PPPPUUUUUFFFYYYY!”

A strategically placed whoopee cushion went off! She looked shocked and turned...

Pink,
Red,
Purple,

And then a shade of embarrassed or was it angry that we had never seen before? →
She simply let her shades fade back to normal and went on with the lesson. Mission one complete.

But did we fail? She did get embarrassed and angry but we did not get the reaction we wanted from her. Frank and I gave each other the half nod.

Time for mission two.

MISSION TWO

Minutes later we were all working quietly in our handwriting books. I was making faces out of the letter p. It looks like some one is sticking their tongue out you see :-p. I looked to over to Frank and nodded. I bumped Stacey Little (the little teacher’s pet who sat next to me) and her pencil drew a line straight across her perfect handwriting page.

“Hey!” she said.

“Oh, so sorry Stacey, I’m so clumsy sometimes. You can fix it if you ask for Mrs Hanger’s eraser.”

Stacey glared and huffed at me, then put on her sweetest smile and put her hand up. She took the bait!

“Yes Stacey,” said Mrs Hanger.

“Somebody bumped me and wrecked my page so I’m wondering if I could please borrow your eraser?”

Mrs Hanger glared at me. I just shrugged and mouthed sorry.

She went over to the top draw of her desk where she kept her eraser and time stood still. Ever so slowly she opened her drawer. Then…

“AAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!” she screamed.

She slammed her drawer shut and leapt onto her chair! Her face turned sickly white and her eyes went as round as a clock face. She pointed at the dead mouse. The class was in hysterics. Mrs Hanger looked mortified and just about ready to crack.

Mission two, almost a complete success...

We were going to have to move on with mission three...

MISSION THREE

One more to go, this would be the sanity breaker.

Just as the bell went for us to eat our lunch Frank distracted Mrs Hanger by telling her one of his long and very boring genius stories about his pet frog Albert’s special training for the Frog Olympics. I quickly snuck into Mrs Hanger’s lunch bag and switched her regular spaghetti sandwich for a Tom Tom Surprise Special.

I gave Frank the all-clear nod. Mrs Hanger took her lunch bag out. She began to unwrap it. Slowly she peeled back the foil layer… I couldn’t take my eyes off her! This was the moment we had been waiting for all day.
I quietly nudged Frank. She opened the foil, took out the sandwich and opened her big mouth as round as a basket ball then …

‘CRUNCH, SQUISH, CRUNCH!’

I couldn’t believe it...

She kept chewing!

Another bite...

And then another...

She chewed and crunched and gulped and swallowed until Stacey Little pointed to Mrs Hanger’s sandwich and screamed.

“WOOOOOOOOOOOORRRRR RRRMMMMMMSSSS SSS! EEEEWW WWWW!”

Mrs Hanger slowly opened what was barely left of her sandwich to find the most disgusting and very alive wriggling worms. She threw it high up into the air.

Her face changed from ghastly white...

To sick green...

Then to beetroot red!

She covered her mouth and ran screaming from the classroom. The class cheered.

Frank and I gave each other the silent nod of satisfaction. Still to this day no one knows it was us... People have speculated. Rumors have spread. We were interrogated... but there was no evidence... no witness...

And as for Mrs Hanger... well our plan worked. Even to this day no one has ever seen her again.

There is an excerpt from Carly’s new book: “Truth Seekers: The Princess and the Door” on page 65 and we have 10 copies to give away to the first 10 who email! See the Giveaways on page 67.
Lavender bath salts

Make some lavender bath salts by combining ½ cup epsom salts, ½ cup of sea salt, one teaspoon of almond oil, five drops of lavender oil and two tablespoons of dried lavender. Store in a jar. Add a scoop to a warm bath as required.
Space to write, doodle, draw or dream.
Books for the Armchair Traveler

by Kimberly Coyle

As an insatiable lover of travel, I often find my bank account and my everyday commitments can’t keep pace with my desire to wander. While my chest beats with a gypsy heart, I also have three children, a job, and a geriatric dog who believes movement of any kind should be incentivized. Travel often falls to second place behind the demands of orthodontic bills, folding laundry, and grading papers.

However, as a lifelong reader, I find my wanderlust is temporarily satisfied through the pages of a good book when rooted in a specific place. As a child, I sat in the buggy beside Anne Shirley as we passed through the White Way of Delight on Prince Edward Island, and I braved the unpredictable weather and challenges of farm life in the American Midwest with Laura Ingalls Wilder. Books became the means by which I experienced a world larger than the boundaries of any map or my limited imagination.

After many years spent living abroad and traveling as an adult, I’ve tasted much of what the world has to offer, and it has only fanned the flames of desire. I discovered wanderlust is a love affair possessing an incurable nature. Four years ago, after a number of years spent living in Switzerland, I found myself, once again, deeply rooted in ordinary life in suburban America.

Again, I turned to the stories of writers who create magic with ink and paper. Their words are the buggy, the ticket, the invitation to worlds I may never encounter anywhere but in their experiences or their imagination.

For a few good reads guaranteed to transport you without the cost of airfare, look no further.

From my bookshelf to yours, your invitation to wander through lands near and distant is waiting.

Non-Fiction

Four Seasons in Rome

by Anthony Doerr:

Doerr’s work is stunning, and this non-fiction book on his year spent living in Rome as an American expat is beautiful. While I connected personally to his life abroad in Europe, armchair travelers will experience Rome intimately through his prose. This book is the perfect companion to his novel All The Light We Cannot See, another gem of a book with a defined sense of place and belonging.
Surprised by Oxford by Carolyn Weber

This memoir ticks all the boxes: excellent writing, intriguing setting, a journey of faith, romantic literature, and copious literary quotes. (Word nerds: head straight to your local library) Weber lived a life I frequently fantasize about as a PhD candidate in Romantic Literature studying in Oxford, England. Weber brings Oxford to life in a way I wish I could experience personally.

The Solace of Open Spaces by Gretel Ehrlich

Readers follow the author on her journey from heartbreak to healing as she leaves behind her life as a filmmaker in California for ranch life in rural Wyoming. Ehrlich finds herself in Wyoming as part of a temporary film project, but after a personal loss, she decides to make Wyoming her home for an indefinite period. Ehrlich chronicles her journey back to love and life, through numbness and grief, against the backdrop of a dry, spacious, empty place. Wyoming’s wide-open physical spaces work like balm for her wounds, and they might work as a balm for readers too.

Roots and Sky by Christie Purifoy

In her memoir of place, Purifoy recounts the first four seasons she and her family spent living in Maplehurst, a well-loved Victorian farmhouse without the pleasure or pain of an actual farm. She describes home and rootedness in a way that is fresh, poetic, gentle. She writes of the everyday, ordinary circumstances through which God used this home to help her discover where she belongs, and in turn to grow deeper in her belonging to him. As a lover of old homes, wild gardens, and the restoration of broken things, this book holds a special place in my heart and on my bookshelf.
Fiction

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn by Betty Smith.

This classic novel is the coming of age tale of a girl called Francie, set in the immigrant communities of Brooklyn in the early 1900’s. I’m always surprised at the timeless nature of stories, and this book is no exception. I saw myself in Francie, despite the time and life circumstances that separate us. It also gave me a renewed appreciation for the challenges faced by immigrants coming to America, as it paints a unique portrait of life in the tenements of New York City.

Gilead
by Marilyn Robinson

Gilead is the story of minister John Ames’ journey to his eternal home as he looks back over the past seventy-six years of his life in Gilead. The town of Gilead is itself a character in Robinson’s book, and as I read, it became as real to me as any home I’ve known. I journeyed with Ames from Iowa to Kansas, from childhood to old age, and back again. While the book is epistolary in nature, Robinson creates distinct descriptive scenes within the journal itself, allowing readers a glimpse into the rural landscape of her characters’ lives. This is a book to savor.

The Poisonwood Bible
by Barbara Kingsolver

This epic tale of the Price family, new missionaries to the Belgian Congo in the 1960’s, is both cautionary and redemptive. Readers travel beside the Prices as they attempt to transition to primitive life in the Congo from a sheltered life in small town America. Told from the perspective of the women in the family, we see postcolonial Africa in all of its danger and complexity. Kingsolver’s book is one of my top five favorites of all time. Unforgettable.
Creative project: watercolour cushion cover

by Abi Partridge

GIVEAWAY

We have a copy of “Re: create, restore your creative soul” from Abi Partridge to give away, see page 67.
Paint slowly, with intention and thought with every paint stroke. When the cushion is finished let it prompt you to further rest in God’s presence, place on a favourite chair or spot where you sit, read or pray.

How to paint your cover

Materials
- plain white cushion cover
- watercolour paints
- fabric medium
- water

Equipment
- paintbrush
- iron or tumble dryer
- palette or plate

Place a plastic carrier inside your cushion cover to prevent paint colour bleeding onto the back of the cover.

Mix your fabric medium with water. Have another water pot for washing your brushes.

Mix a few shades of lavender colour. Wet your brush with the fabric medium mix and then use to wet your watercolour paints.

Paint the lavender sprigs by painting green stems. You may wish to lightly mark in pencil first. Paint the petals using different tones of lilac and purple.

Paint some green leaves on the bottom of the stems.

If you wish to paint the words also on the cushion, copy the brush script on page 56. Write it in pencil first. You can thicken up the down stems of the letters, the words and letters don’t need to be painted in one stroke, even if they give the impression they were.

When the cover is dry, heat set the paint in the dryer or with a hair dryer.

Fill your cover with a pad and place in a special chair.
be still
CHAPTER ONE

One warm spring day, Isabella Johnson and her bestie, Josie Springwood, decided to play the “imagine if” game. This was a game that had started many a fun adventure in the seven years of their friendship. Little did they realise that this particular time it would lead them into an adventure that would alter the rest of their lives...

The girls were lying under the shade of the squiggly gum tree, in the middle of coastal bushland, not far from Isabella’s house. It was one of their favourite places to go.

Isabella loved to dream. She was the kind of girl who did what she was told and always sought to care for others above herself. She had a peace about her, despite all she had been through. Her complexion and tiny frame often left Josie wondering if she indeed was from the bloodline of some famous royal family.

Josie was the kind of girl who sought out adventure. She imagined the people, their characteristics and how they had become who they were. She loved the drama. Some would say Josie was disobedient, but Isabella knew she was just curious; she couldn't help herself sometimes.

Her hair was often a tangle of messy auburn curls above her deep green eyes. She was strong and courageous; one had to be with three older brothers.

On this particular day, Isabella began to imagine that the maidens had laced the tree branches with a beautiful bunting of purple flowers. They were busily preparing for the wedding party of Princess Buttercup. She was to wed the Prince Arthur this very night!

Meanwhile, Josie imagined that Princess Buttercup was being forced to marry Prince Arthur—so that the kingdoms could live in peace—when actually, Princess Buttercup had fallen in love with a humble merchant. She had met him on one of her secret outings, where she would dress as a peasant girl and go out to really get to know her people. She was unaware that this humble merchant was Prince Arthur doing the same as she!

“Oh, imagine that!” Isabella cried out delightfully.

“Yeah, but there’d need to be an evil queen or king of some kind that would still try to stop the wedding,” said Josie, her brow furrowing in deep thought.

“Oh, imagine that!” Isabella cried out delightfully.

“Really? Why can’t it just be happily-ever-after, Josie?”

Josie looked at her friend and smiled, “because all good things are worth fighting for!”

They both giggled and then let out a deep sigh.

“If only we could imagine things to be perfect, Jose, this world...my world would be so much better.”

Josie knew the depth of sorrow behind Isabella’s voice was deep and sincere. For the last five years Isabella’s mother had been missing:
her father had to work all the time and all her other relatives lived too far away to care for her. She was lonely. That’s how they came up with the “imagine if” game, to create friends and family to help take away the loneliness. Josie saw her friend grasping the key chain necklace that was always around her neck. She once told Josie that it was the only thing left of her mother’s as her father had thrown everything else away.

He couldn’t endure the pain of seeing her mother’s things around their home.

“I know,” said Josie standing and pulling Isabella to her feet, “imagine if the key on your mother’s chain could open the door?”

Isabella’s eyes lit up to a bright sky blue and were as round as a clock face; the corners of her mouth ever-so-delicately turned upward into a smile.

You see, there was an old stone door that stood nearby the gum tree, still in its frame but with no house around it. It had beautiful, ancient carvings and a glorious stone heart that had been cracked down the middle. Her father had told her it was an old ruin and to stay away in case it fell and hurt them. However, Josie, being so curious, and Isabella, wanting so much to imagine another life, often found themselves playing with the door and including it in many of their “imagine if” adventures.

“Why yes, of course!” cried Isabella, “it must have some kind of use and it is very ancient looking.”

The girls giggled and ran toward the door. The door was so tall and solemn, like a tall soldier returning from war. Every sound in the bush fell silent as Isabella reached toward the lock. The girls looked at one another, took a deep breath and silently nodded. Isabella pushed the key into the lock.

“It actually fits?” she whispered.

The girls looked at each other a little excited and a little in shock. Isabella turned the key. “Click!”

Both the girls now stood staring at the door, unable to move or to breathe. They then both pushed the door open and what they saw took their breath away.

A life changing adventure awaits Isabella Johnson and her bestie Josie Springwood when their tweenage curiosity leads them beyond the stone door. They find themselves in another world bursting at the seams with answers and adventure! Embark on this journey with the girls as they learn many life lessons about friendship, family and faith along the way.

This is the first book in a trilogy. You can also find:

Book Two: Truth Seekers: The Secret Places

Book Three: Truth Seekers: Be Strong and Courageous

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**GIVEAWAY**

We have 10 copies to give away of The Princess and The Door, from Carly Thomson. To enter see details on page 67. →
Giveaways

ENTRY
To enter to win these books, send your name and mailing address and title/s you would like to win to win@iolamagazine.com, first to respond wins. Closing date: June 30th 2018. Open to US, Canadian and UK residents only.

“Truth Seekers, The Princess and The Door”, from Carly Thomson. We have 10 copies to give away!

“Re: create, restore your creative soul” (the creative projects guide) and workbook (a week of creative moments) from Abi Partridge.

“Pearls for the bride” by Laura Thomas. A non-fiction for newly weds.

“The Glorious Ordinary An invitation to study God’s word in your everyday life,” by Sarah E. Frazer.

Download free 5 simple steps to trusting God guide from Niki Hardy at nikihardy.com
For those of us who know we haven’t got it all together, who are messy and unfinished.

For today;
May we meet the day with innocent expectation, not cynical or world weary or jaded.
Let childlike curiosity mark our moments.

May we be brave enough to admit we don’t know the answer, and wise enough to ask for help.
Let us be relieved of the burden of certainty.

May we be happy not to have the last word, the last laugh.
Apart from at our selves.
Let us not take ourselves so seriously.

May we be fools for love, for beauty and laughter ever on our lips.
Let the possibility of joy be around every corner.
BE WHO GOD MEANT YOU TO BE & YOU WILL SET THE WORLD ON FIRE