

A photograph of a woman with short white hair, wearing a black dress and a long necklace, standing to the left of a large, ornate red double door. The door is set within a stone archway. The text is overlaid on the image.

REFLECTIONS FROM OXFORD

# WELL LIVED

SHAPING A LEGACY  
OF GRATITUDE AND GRACE

SALLY CLARKSON

# WELL LIVED

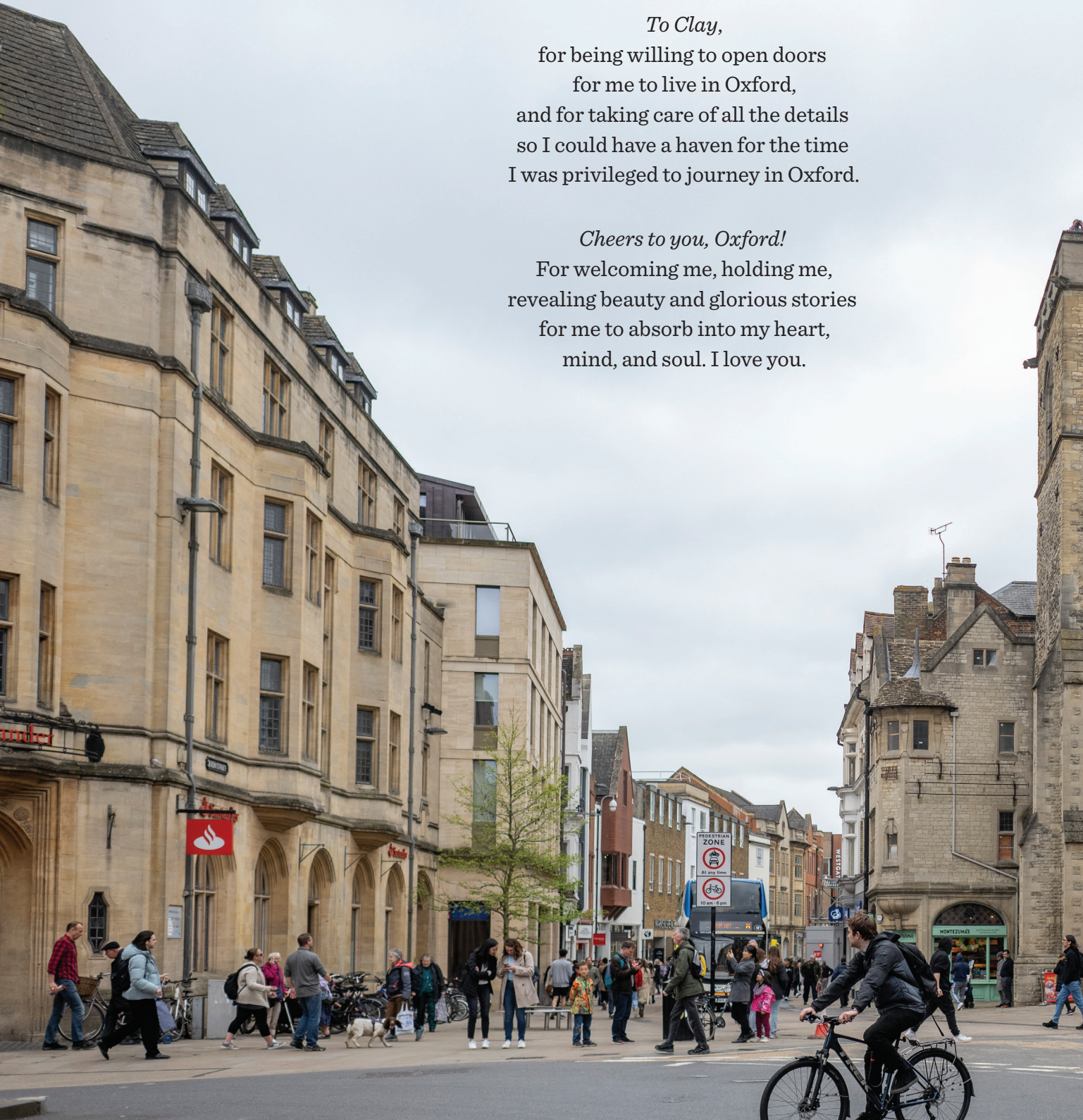
SALLY CLARKSON



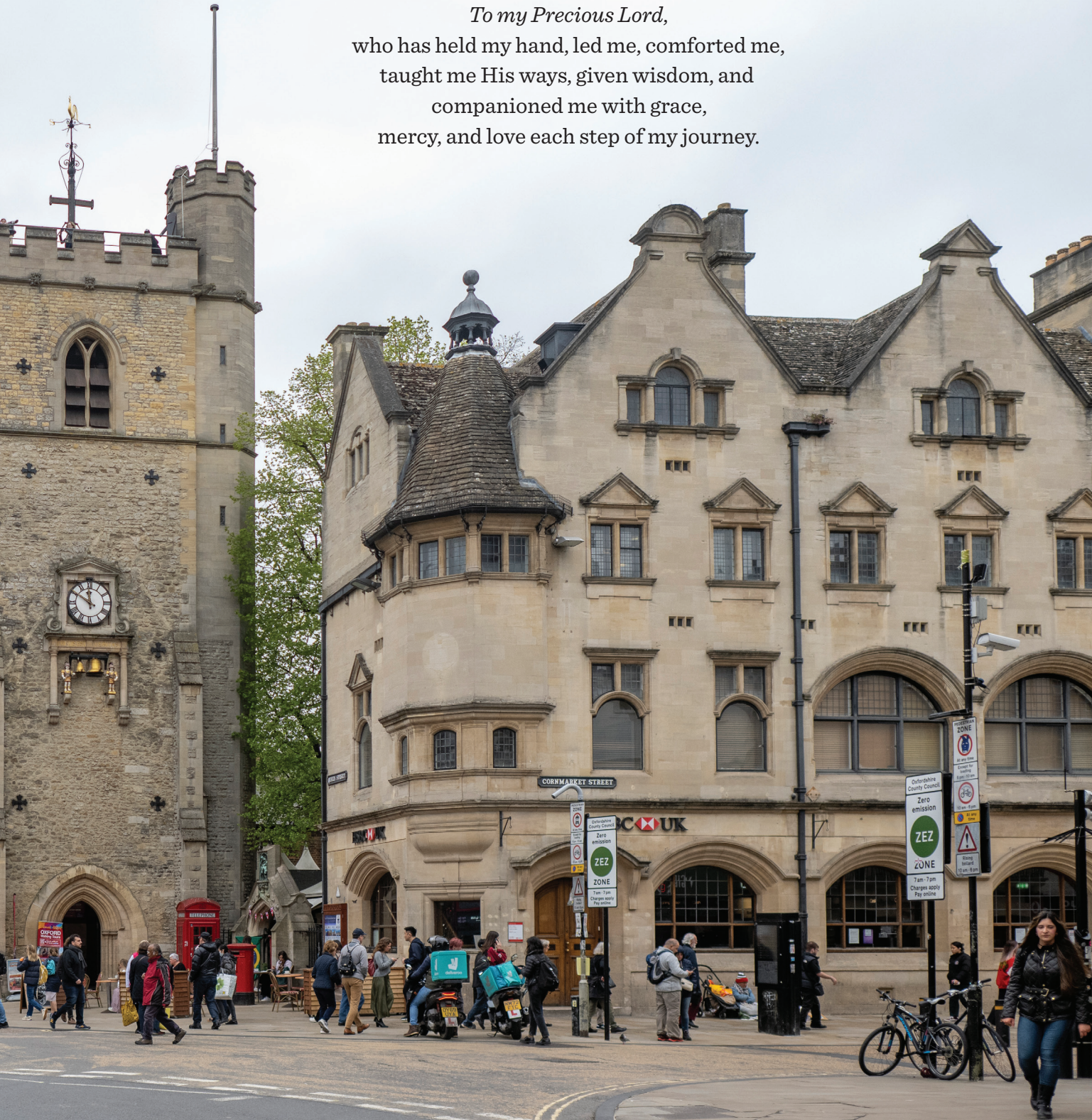
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*To Clay,*  
for being willing to open doors  
for me to live in Oxford,  
and for taking care of all the details  
so I could have a haven for the time  
I was privileged to journey in Oxford.

*Cheers to you, Oxford!*  
For welcoming me, holding me,  
revealing beauty and glorious stories  
for me to absorb into my heart,  
mind, and soul. I love you.



*To my Precious Lord,*  
who has held my hand, led me, comforted me,  
taught me His ways, given wisdom, and  
companioned me with grace,  
mercy, and love each step of my journey.



A landscape photograph showing a wide, green field in the foreground, possibly a park or sports field. In the background, there is a line of trees and a few small buildings. The sky is filled with large, white, fluffy clouds. A semi-transparent light orange rectangular box is centered in the upper half of the image, containing a quote in italics and the name of the author.


*The purpose of life is...  
to be useful, to be honorable,  
to be compassionate,  
to have it make some difference  
that you have lived and lived well.*

RALPH WALDO EMERSON



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# LEAVING A LEGACY OF A WELL-LIVED LIFE

*Blessed is a person who finds wisdom,  
And one who obtains understanding.  
For her profit is better than the profit of silver,  
And her produce better than gold.  
She is more precious than jewels,  
And nothing you desire compares with her.  
Long life is in her right hand;  
In her left hand are riches and honor.  
Her ways are pleasant ways,  
And all her paths are peace.  
She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her,  
And happy are those who hold on to her.*

PROVERBS 3:13-18

**F**ive short years ago, I melted into the folds of a deep, squishy couch, stuffed into a tiny living room in an old Oxford flat. My oldest daughter, Sarah, lived there with her husband and baby girl. She was holding my first grandchild, Lilian, a few months old, gently bouncing her in the air, resulting in giggles and smiles.

“Mama, what do you want to be called as a grandmother? I think it should be something unique and creative that reflects your personality and what you like.”



*Who has put wisdom in  
the innermost being,  
Or given understanding  
to the mind?*

JOB 38:36

As it happened, the two years before, our family had been working our way through a British drama series called *Lark Rise to Candleford*. This television series was loosely based on a trilogy of semi-autobiographical books by Flora Thompson during the latter years of the 1800s. Set in Lark Rise, a small rural village, delightful tales were spun about the country folk who often interacted with the more upscale, prosperous folk in the larger neighboring town of Candleford. Each episode brought heart-touching, humor-laced, folksy stories, opening windows to family life, community gossip, festivals, and celebrations, as well as connection made through the varied adventures.

A beloved character, Queenie, was a wizened old woman who was the sage matriarch of Lark Rise. With witty charm and a warmhearted countenance, she shared her insight, experience, advice, and encouragement from the domain of her homey house on the top hill of the town. Her homespun remedies brought healing; her recipes, comfort and satisfaction; her love, hope and cheerfulness of heart. She always had a story to tell that intrigued her listeners and invited them to apply the wisdom of the tale. The people of her village trusted her because of her years of serving her community with great affection, friendship, and insight. Ever charitable, extending guidance and support, she ruled the small village from the humble kingdom of her home.

As we were talking, Sarah suggested, “Mom, you are like Queenie, benevolent, distributing goodwill, cheer, and wisdom to all who come into your sphere. I think your grandchildren should call you ‘Queenie.’” Honored by her gracious words, I became Queenie to all the little people birthed by my children.

Later, my younger daughter, Joy, said, “I was the one who suggested Queenie, don’t you remember?” While there were varying recollections about who bestowed the name, there was agreement that Queenie in some way defined my approach to shaping a well-lived life. After all, my name, Sally, means “princess,” and it is only right that at age 70, I would graduate from princess to queen, thanks to my girls.





Historically, a good queen brought about a life-giving influence as she considered herself a steward, responsible for the long-term prosperity and flourishing of those who were within her realm. Her significant role affected the legacy of her life, the story she would live, the heritage she would leave. It also influenced the legacy of her family, community, and world in the rare times a queen gave herself to the full task of all that had been entrusted to her. Being a steward over human beings can have great impact over generations if the faithfulness and generosity of the queen is purposefully focused and lived out over a lifetime.

In time, I began to realize how much “Queenie” represented to me the better aspects of my womanhood—the picture I had in my heart of becoming royalty when I was adopted by God, and the idea that I was His servant and He my king and companion. I have rather liked embracing this role actively in the lives of my family and friends. And I was honored to play my part in His plan well and purposefully.

### Wisdom and Womanhood

Decades before I was Queenie to the grands, I had longed for companionship and wise input throughout all the seasons of my work, marriage, parenting, and ministry so that I could play my part well. Yet often, as a wife, mother, friend, and professional writer, I was figuring it out alone, without much mentorship or direction. This earlier lack of guidance stirred in me a growing desire to be an encouraging companion to others who also longed for friendship that called them to their best selves. I wanted to validate their efforts to write a great story with their lives through steadfastness, love, and grace. I became a treasure hunter, gathering insight and knowledge along the way so I would be equipped to help others find direction, meaning, courage, and contentment.

I came by much of my experience and wisdom simply by living my life long enough and trying at every turn to trust God as my confidant, guide, and strength. Now, reviewing my life comes with a sense of awe and surprise. So much has happened in this full and multidimensional life of mine. At this point in time, I’ve been married 43 years, birthed and educated 4 children, written 30 books and worked with 8 different publishers, moved 24 times—9 times internationally—and lived in 4 countries, spoken to hundreds of thousands of people, worked in missions and ministry for 51 years, and hosted



*For if we live,  
we live for the Lord.*

ROMANS 14:8



*But if any of you lacks  
wisdom, let him ask of God,  
who gives to all generously  
and without reproach, and  
it will be given to him.*

JAMES 1:5

23 national conferences for 80,000 people. I have lived through surgeries, heartbreak, stress, car wrecks, and personal failures, but I have also experienced great joy, unconditional love, deep friendship, excellent teaching from others, and the intimacy of walking with God as my companion for 53 years.

I deeply love being a matriarch—a woman learning to live into my capacity, slowly becoming confident of the powerful influence I could wield in the places I live and in the lives of my people. My influence would come through serving them in love, cultivating goodness, nurturing their spirits, and passing on hard-earned lessons. I found that by giving my life, laying it down, so to speak, others could



draw life and encouragement from me. This role became the most profound and fulfilling endeavor of my life.



Unexpectedly, serendipitously, the opportunity to spend months at a time in Oxford came to me in my late 60s. Oxford became a place I would sort of “sabbatical” for some months over a few years to be near my grandchildren, to celebrate life with my own children, to reflect on life, to explore the stories of others in days gone by, to store wisdom in my soul and enjoy my people. After 50 years of working hard and long through ministry, my husband said, “You need some months of escape where you can ponder life, enjoy



your grandchildren, and breathe a bit.” Wanting to share from the stunning adventures I had, the interesting places I grew to love as I walked the cobbled streets and pondered life over long cups of tea, I decided to place this book into the context of times I spent in what became my beloved Oxford.

Learning and understanding that every woman has potential to embrace her own story, to become “queen” over her own domain, to work hard to leave a legacy of wisdom, love, gratitude, and grace emerged as a message while I walked through parks and meadows and wrote in my journal. Women, I believe, are amazing creatures and have the ability to civilize the world, to influence generations by generously pouring out love, training the very character and souls of the next generation and persevering through great trials and challenges while coming out resiliently.

The book of Proverbs in the Bible hails the wondrous attributes of women. Proverbs 31:10 even says, “Her worth is far above jewels,” a veritable treasure in the times of Solomon who wrote this book before Christ. And Proverbs 4:5-9 reveals the many blessings of getting wisdom:

Get wisdom, get understanding;  
do not forget my words or turn away from them.  
Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you;  
love her, and she will watch over you.  
The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom.  
Though it cost all you have, get understanding.  
Cherish her, and she will exalt you;  
embrace her, and she will honor you.  
She will give you a garland to grace your head  
and present you with a glorious crown. (NIV)

Early in my adult journey, the Word of God became my instruction for all of the pathways of my life. What I discovered was that true, foundational wisdom was not relative, subject to whim and mood. God had provided leadership, pathways to follow, truths to enact in order to live well, flourishing over a lifetime. And yet I realized



*Be very careful, then,  
how you live—not as  
unwise but as wise.*

EPHESIANS 5:15 NIV

that biblical wisdom is not prescriptive, but often open-ended, able to be practiced in many different ways, in a variety of contexts and life stories, through unique personalities, cultures, and circumstances.

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embrace her own story, to become  
“queen” over her own domain, to  
work hard to leave a legacy of  
wisdom, love, gratitude, and grace.

I began to picture my own heart, soul, and mind as a treasure chest where I stored up wisdom, insight, and perspective through all the twists and turns of my life. And from this treasure chest, I would draw insight and instruction for others if it might help encourage them along their way. And others would draw from me what I had stored in my treasure chest of life. Eventually I pictured my children’s hearts as treasure chests in which to deposit wisdom and truth.

Living into my role as queen, guardian, protector, lover, and provider for those in my own realm, I sought to actively pursue opportunities where I might bring hope into discouragement, faith into doubt, love where there are broken or lonely hearts. Understanding that life is filled with tragedy in a fallen, broken world has prepared me to have compassion for others and a capacity to companion those who are grieving or struggling. I consider it a privilege. I have longed for sympathy and comfort in my own life, and I hoped to give some small bit to others.







Pointing out the beautiful fingerprints of God, the dimension of the world He crafted for our pleasure, the gifts of love hidden in our relationships, and that light is always more powerful than the darkness are some of my heart treasures I stored.

My hope was that I could guide, inspire, support my own beloveds through the passages of their own lives. As I matured over time and moved more gracefully into my role, I grew in my desire to come alongside other women, in the realm of influence God had opened up (and men—especially my own boys!) to provide some leadership and encouragement about what I had learned. And so began years of books, conferences, blog posts, and podcasts.

### **Time to Grow and Become**

As the message of this book simmered in my imagination over months, I realized it was part memoir about how I have evolved and grown through the years. I grew to become a sort of queen in my own realm as I acquired understanding and insight over seven decades. This book is also a continuation of that early desire to come alongside others and open a window to life so they won't feel alone in their journey. I hope to pass along more freedom, more grace, more beauty in the pages ahead.

A few days ago, I came upon a grandchild of mine who was singing at the top of her lungs and dancing around the living room, and I joined in enthusiastically. It is an image of what I hope you will find in the pages of this book: encouragement to experience life in its fullness, to enter into the joy that is offered, even amidst the mundane. My offerings from my life in photos are meant to show some of the amazing places Oxford brought my way as I explored, pondered, and breathed in peace. I relearned ways to celebrate life, to soak in the beauty that every day holds.

Pressures, darkness, and struggles of life will come and go. Yet the secret of learning to see hidden beauty that surrounds us and to experience the gift of friends and loved ones is to cultivate the wisdom to enjoy the moments you have been given each day. This is the beginning of a life well lived.

I have no formula or agenda I think all women should follow. But I offer some of my stories and experiences while in Oxford these past years. I hope that it might bring grace, freedom, and encouragement to you, a fellow traveler on this road to a well-lived life.



*Every man's life is a fairy tale, written by God's fingers.*

HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN

I pray you will give yourself time to grow and learn, and grace when you falter or make mistakes along the way. I hope that you, like me, will find the freedom to live vibrantly into your own unique story, especially suited for your personality and for your circumstances. Life for most of us is a long journey, lived over decades. We have time to grow, to become, to access what is deep within our hearts to “be,” and we will find the poise with which to live a meaningful and fruitful life.



*To live well and  
honorably and justly  
are the same thing.*

SOCRATES

Women have an endless capability to civilize life; to pen or verbalize great messages of God’s truth; to fulfill potential in ourselves and others intellectually, spiritually, emotionally; to be astute in a variety of areas of skill and expertise. We are great comforters, able nurses, gardeners of souls and soil. We are musicians who celebrate the symphonies of life and artists who create, gather, and share beauty.

We were not left without leadership. God has granted us secrets of wisdom and understanding in His Word, the Bible, while also gifting us with wide ranges of how to embody this wisdom. There are wise ways to follow, with much freedom to apply them uniquely within the context and diversity of our own stories. Becoming queen of your own domain and becoming the ruler over your life story are lifelong pursuits and will be unique for each woman, and can provide deep soul satisfaction in the pursuit.

I hope that you, like me, will find the freedom to live  
vibrantly into your own unique story, especially suited  
for your personality and for your circumstances.










I never could have imagined that I would have the privilege of living in Oxford, United Kingdom, at this season of life. The gift of time each year in Oxford has afforded me the ability to ponder and reflect on my life and the importance of living with determination to fill my days with what really matters. Oxford is the place where I have tied together many thoughts, experienced beauty, and dwelled on wisdom from those who have gone before me. And all of this done while sipping tea, walking cobbled streets, meeting lovely friends, and opening my eyes to new places, experiences, and fun.

In my journal I have written of obstacles overcome, wisdom gained, and discoveries made about the truth and mercy that flow beneath this one life of mine. This book reflects some of the lessons I have learned and the grace I have experienced in this life-giving place and in this life-giving season. I treasure my days as Queenie as I kiss the heads of my grands and walk the parks and canals and meet people from all over the world. These moments are rich because I am living them as well as possible with the full understanding that being loving and grateful through each day is the key.

It is my hope that this length of path we walk together will validate your own vision for your life and validate your great worth as a woman who brings light, beauty, and wisdom to your own people and places. Let us link arms together in dear friendship and enjoy a stroll through Oxford side by side. I cannot wait to share my favorite places, my delights, my ponderings, and my joy. May every step encourage your well-lived journey. Cheers, my friend.



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