

Stories of

*Love, Hope
and Healing*

for All Ages

Joan Zawatzky

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For Estelle

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A note from the author



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Since childhood, stories have enriched my life. Some of my earliest memories are of sitting with my grandmother on her old-fashioned couch listening to her stories while she indulged me with cookies, ice cream, and chocolates. Her stories originated from the *shtetl* (a small town in Eastern Europe), where she was born, and the large city she occasionally visited with wide-eyed excitement. They were powerful and loving stories, full of joy and sadness, and a lesson in the resilience of the human spirit.

My mother's bedtime stories began with "Once upon a time" and opened a magical window to fairies, goblins, giants, lovely maidens and princes. They stirred my imagination and fired my fantasies and dreams. My grandmother and my mother enjoyed telling me stories as much as I enjoyed listening to them. It was our loving connection that enhanced them in my memory.

Sadly, my father's many stories about his escape from the horrors of war-torn Europe, and his years of fighting in North Africa with the Allied Forces were locked away from me. In those times men did not tell war stories to their children. They shared them with other men over a beer.

Later, when I began to write my own stories, I was able to explore ideas, to imagine other people's lives, and visit different places and situations that ordinarily I wouldn't have been able to access.

As a counsellor, I found storytelling a subtle means of helping people trying to cope with troubling issues. Stories allow adults and children to explore their feelings safely, understand how others feel, come to terms with difficult situations, or learn new and positive ways of responding.



After writing and telling many stories, I am convinced that love is one of the most powerful ingredients in stories that heal. Stories inspired by love take us beyond facts. They speak to our hearts and souls.

All the stories in this book are part of me. I have learned so much from writing them, and I am delighted to share my belief in


Stories Of Love, Hope and Healing

the healing power of love with you. If one story doesn't speak to you loudly enough, try reading another. Listen to your intuition. I hope that you will find the stories enjoyable, that they will tickle your imagination, and inspire you to find your own answers.

Joan Zawatzky



Introduction



Love, hope and healing

Love speaks to our hearts. It is the core of our existence and conveys our deepest emotions of kindness, compassion, gratitude, and empathy. Through it our deepest needs are met.

The strange thing is that everyone has their own interpretation of what love is. For many people love is a feeling, a “liking”. But, love is far more than that, and it is not one thing. It occurs on many levels, whether it is romantic love, the care and affection for a child, parents, a pet, or a country. It can be connected to a concept, or be an integral part of religious belief.

Love is an unconditional and passionate commitment to another person, a concept, or activity. The needing and giving of love is the essence of the interdependence we have on one another. It binds us as human beings, keeps families and communities together and gives deeper meaning to our lives.

Love can be uplifting and rewarding, but it can be cruel too, as in the loss of love by rejection, disloyalty, or due to the death or disappearance of a loved one.

Self-love

Self-love is not merely a platitude. Self-love is about knowing that we matter, and that we are worthy of being loved. It is about being kind, caring and considerate to ourselves when we are struggling, sad or unwell. When we value ourselves, and allow ourselves to be who we are, we are able to love others as well. We are open to new ideas and focussed on achieving our own meaning and purpose

Unfortunately, many of us find it difficult to appreciate ourselves. We deny our positive qualities, judge ourselves harshly, and seek approval from others. Self-love is not merely feeling good, being self-absorbed or selfish. It involves accepting our shortcomings as well as our strengths, and having compassion for ourselves when we face life’s serious challenges.

For many of us, trying to find a source of self-love can appear fruitless. Early unhappy memories about lack of affection can weigh us down and fill our thoughts with sadness. The idea of unconditional self-love can seem like an impossible fantasy, but if we care about ourselves, we are able to ask for help when we need it, without shame or embarrassment. Caring and appreciating who we are can be a lengthy journey, and we may need help along the way. Sharing ideas and thoughts with supportive, caring people can help us to rediscover love in ourselves.

Healing and Storytelling

When we read a story, we lose ourselves in the lives of others, and without realising it, it touches us. We create our own inner association with our memories, dreams, hopes or experiences. A story can be a powerful echo of the past that affects our present choices, and changes the direction we take. If what we are telling ourselves is negative or unhelpful, or we are not handling a situation well, a story can be an important wake-up call. Stories can help us to develop new ways of thinking about who we are, how we treat ourselves and others.

In ancient cultures healers or shamans were, and still are, storytellers. Elders of the Australian Aboriginal and Native American Indian tribes, as well as other indigenous cultures, have been telling stories about cultural values and traditions to help young people to find their place in a community for thousands of years. Storytelling has been, and still is, included in community rituals as part of healing.

We are all storytellers

We are all storytellers and have our own stories. Storytelling is one of the few universal activities across cultures, past and present. Stories are our basic form of communication and connection. They explain who we are, give meaning to the pattern of our lives and put information into context. Stories are the language of our

thoughts and feelings. They are the way we reach out to each other. Our stories entertain, comfort, teach, touch us within, and heal. A crying baby tells the story of his hunger, a tearful child complains to his mother about being bullied at school, partners discuss their day at work, television shows us a new product on the market, and social media spreads stories about occurrences in our community or wider society.

The history of storytelling

Storytelling is the earliest form of spreading knowledge, recording events, maintaining traditions, and cultural and moral values from one generation to another. Even before stories were told orally, people painted their stories on the walls of caves. Ancient Australian Aboriginal rock art is still visible on cave walls. The early Egyptians wrote their stories on papyrus, and carved them in stone. The bible contains some of the earliest stories. Early Mesopotamian, Greek and Roman myths are full of symbolic meaning.

During the Middle Ages, minstrels and troubadours travelled the countryside telling and singing their stories. They were highly respected and in demand, and provided a link to the history of local areas. With the invention of the printing press in the early 1500's books gradually overtook the role of the troubadour storyteller. Though stories remained popular throughout the centuries, the audience no longer sat in a circle around the storyteller to hear them.

Today, storytelling has changed dramatically. Wi-Fi, smart-phones, social media, video, and television play a dominant role in our lives, but stories continue to be an essential way of staying connected, sharing ideas, spreading information, and shaping public opinion. In spite of the numerous technological advances, the simple act of storytelling by an individual to a group of people has been undergoing a revival, and the number of storytelling festivals and associations have increased.

Storytelling has become a significant part of our lives, in families, classrooms, therapy, marketing, and motivational team building, in both sport and business.

Storytelling in the classroom

When a teacher tells a story, a relaxed and intimate atmosphere is created in the classroom. Textbooks, and more recently computers are undoubtedly important necessary tools for learning. When children are listening to a story, they are focussed and involved. They identify with the choices and actions of heroes and heroines which allows them to view situations and their own difficulties from a different perspective.

Storytelling encourages children to read more, it increases their vocabulary, improves their comprehension, memory and listening skills. It inspires children to talk about, and write their own stories.

Stories help to explain concepts and promote discussion. Carefully chosen stories teach children to appreciate individual and cultural differences, or deal with troubling issues, such as bullying, feelings of isolation or lack of confidence. Children who are unmotivated or struggling to grasp abstract ideas find listening to stories an easier and more enjoyable form of learning than textbook learning.

As part of a lesson or to stimulate discussion, teachers can use the stories in this book, or adapt them slightly to highlight a particular issue. Names of characters and places can be altered to suit a particular child or group of children.

Storytelling for parents

Unlike written stories, family stories are free and can be told at any time or place. They provide a bonding experience for parents and children. Though reading stories to children serves an important purpose, telling a child your personal or family story helps to develop a more intense connection. Children will find

stories about relatives past and present, or tales about your life intriguing, such as your first day at school, a time you were scared, but overcame your fear, or how you made friends at school.

Stories about your family and culture pass on your values, traditions and heritage. Through stories, children learn where they belong, about acceptable behavior, and actions to avoid. Stories from other cultures help children to understand and respect the differences in lifestyle and traditions of other people as well.

Not all family stories are pleasant, relaxing or have perfect outcomes. For some families, painful or traumatic stories are an important part of their history, and the people they have become. In understanding how problems were resolved and challenges met in the past, children will be inspired to find new ways of solving some of their own difficulties. Telling stories to children is beneficial if told in a positive way, and takes into account the age, emotional and developmental level of children.

Sharing of stories and experiences of the day are a valuable part of the natural communication between parents and their children, and for many, continue well into adult years.

Some suggestions for parents when reading stories to their children:

- Read a story that you enjoy telling as much as your child enjoys listening.
- While a story cannot solve a child's problems, it is a useful tool that can help during a difficult period in your child's life.
- Begin by reading stories that are about topics or situations important to your child, that suit feelings or attitudes at the time. Later, your child may be open to listening to a wider range of stories.
- If your child is bored by a story it may be too simple. A story that causes your child to become restless or distracted may be too complicated, or difficult to understand.

Stories for troubled teenagers

Adolescence is frequently a time of turbulence. Many teenagers feel isolated and vulnerable in our ever changing, complex world. As they begin to assert their independence and find their individual identity, they tend to connect strongly with their peers, and begin to distance themselves from their parents. A teenager struggling to cope with personal issues may be reluctant to turn to a parent for help.

Storytelling is a pleasant, safe and entertaining way for parents and teenagers to communicate. Of course, finding the most appropriate time is important. Relevant stories can be told in a spontaneous and relaxed manner while driving, around a camp fire, during a walk, or while working on a task together.

When teenagers immerse themselves in a story, they identify with the characters and situations. This gives them the opportunity to experiment freely with conflicting values and imagine real life consequences. Stories demonstrate a variety of ways to manage a situation that can translate to real life situations.

Storytelling is an effective way of motivating teenagers in a gentle, constructive way. Some suggestions of helpful stories in this book for young adults are, for example, about bullying at school and online, sexual abuse, leaving home, family relationships, love, gaining self-esteem, overcoming obstacles and dealing with change.

Enjoyment of a story and then sharing ideas and feelings through discussion can deepen existing bonds between parents and teenagers, or regenerate communication.

Storytelling in marketing

Storytelling has become a popular technique used in marketing. A story can set a company or brand apart from its competition by giving it character or personality that draws people to it. The use of power point and bullet lists from an overhead projector in a presentation has its place, but storytelling is a more personal

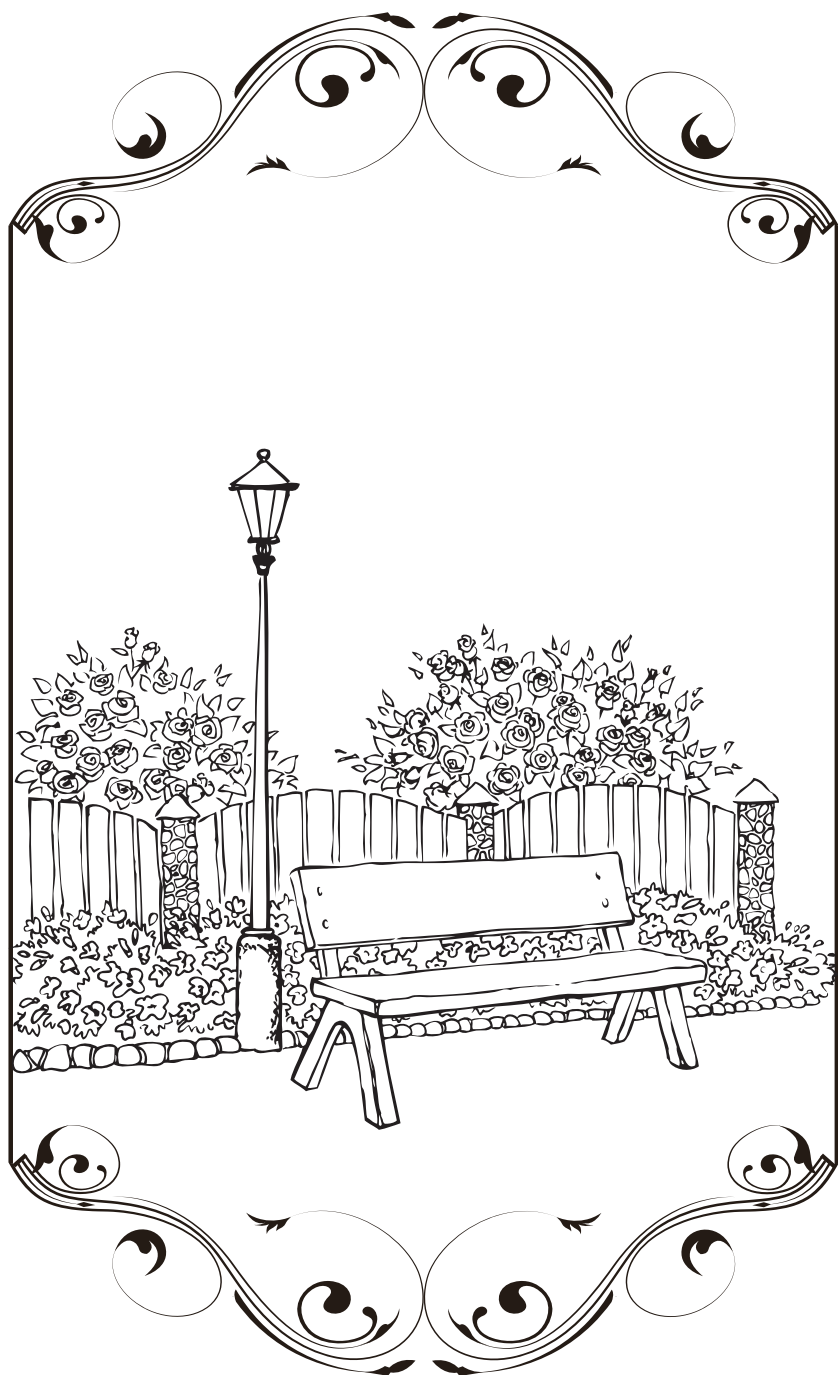
way of imparting information. Facts conveyed are likely to be remembered if they arouse the emotions of empathy, sympathy, anger or amusement.


The brain, science and stories

We have always known intuitively that stories stimulate and inspire us, change the way we think and feel, as well as the way we interact with others.


Recently, neurobiological research using neuroimaging techniques such as MRI scans, have shown that changes in the brain can occur in response to an emotionally charged story. The brain does not make a distinction between a real experience and one we read or hear about. In stories, the brain responds to descriptions of smells and movement, and processes them like an actual encounter. Researchers have found that emotionally compelling stories affect our attitudes and inspire us, allow us to perceive things differently, increase our understanding and empathy for others, and can be motivating.

Research in this fascinating new area is ongoing, and we hope to learn more soon.





About Families



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Family Treasures

The day Sarah and Matthew were married in the small country church, the celebration was tinged with sadness. The couple intended to leave their family and community after the reception. Almost the entire farming community attended the wedding reception as free drinks, food and dancing was an attraction. Sarah's father was not a wealthy man, but that year he had sold his lambs for a good price. He wanted to give the couple a memorable send off. Sarah's sister organised the striped marquee, pink and white flowers to match Sarah's dress, and long tables groaning with food.

Sarah and Matthew led the dancing that continued late into the night. When the band finally packed up their instruments, and the last drinks were served, Sarah's father called his daughter aside. His words pleading her to stay for at least a few more years were on his lips, but he did not speak them. She was his first born and his favourite child, but he had to let her go.

Matthew was ambitious for wealth and success. He was determined to leave the small town for a future in the city. As reluctant as Sarah was to leave her family, she adored Matthew and was prepared to do almost anything to please him.

Sarah's father hugged and kissed his daughter. He then handed her a small red leather box. 'Your mother and I want you and Matthew to have some of our family treasures,' he said. 'When you leave us, our history should be with you, so that you can pass it on to your children.'

The couple's departure from the station was accompanied by good wishes from their families and friends, and a round of tears. Once they had settled in the train for the long journey, Sarah felt in her carry bag for the box her parents had given her.

She ran her fingers over the fine leather. When she opened the box, a familiar photograph of her parents and sister lay against the lid. Beneath the photograph, was a delicate silk scarf with a sprig of blue flowers that had belonged to her grandmother. She stroked the scarf, remembering her grandmother's blue eyes sparkling when she wore it on special occasions. There was a silver teaspoon engraved with a decorative handle that had belonged to her great grandmother. Her mother had used it only for visitors. A tortoiseshell comb inlaid with mother of pearl brought back fond memories of family gatherings, and the fun she once had playing with her cousins. Great aunt Bessie had inherited it from her grandmother and worn it with pride in her long auburn hair. Tucked into one corner of the box was a black velvet pouch containing three gold coins that had belonged to her great grandfather. In the other corner was a small blue case containing a silver brooch in the form of a dove with shimmering wings. The dove's eye was made from a glinting red jewel. It had been a wedding gift to her great-grandmother from her beloved cousin.

Their arrival in the city was exciting, but the couple realised that life there would be more difficult than they had imagined. After searching, they found a small furnished room. It was stark and dreary, but all they could afford. Immediately they both looked for work. Though Matthew had managed a farming co-operative, he was unable to find an administrative job in the city. Sarah had worked as receptionist for a country doctor, but she could not find work either.

'I know how much you wanted to come to the city,' Sarah said, stroking Matthew's hand. 'As much as I love you I wouldn't have agreed to come if I'd known finding a job would be so hard.'

Matthew gave Sarah a kiss. 'Be patient, it will take time to find something that suits us. Meanwhile we might have to take whatever is available.'

Matthew worked as a casual labourer while continuing to look for a more suitable job, but Sarah was still unable to find work. With only Matthew's income their savings dwindled. It was then that Sarah thought of the gold coins. One coin would provide them with food for the month, and possibly go towards paying the rent as well. As reluctant as she was, she took a coin to a pawn broker and returned with a sheaf of money. Now that the red box had been opened, it was as if the seal to the past had been broken.

She was beginning to think that she would never find work, when she noticed an advertisement for a hotel maid. She applied, and started the next morning. While cleaning one of the rooms in the hotel, she met a doctor and his wife, who were staying in the hotel for a few days. When the doctor realised that she had worked as a doctor's receptionist in the country, he offered her a job.

They were just able to scrape by when Matthew came across a carpenter in the city mall who owned a large furniture stall. Matthew's hobby had been carpentry, and over the years he had made almost all his parent's furniture. He knew fine work when he saw it and complimented the carpenter who was flattered. After a friendly chat, the carpenter offered to employ Matthew to help him with office work and basic carpentry.

At last he had a solid job. In his free time he sharpened his skills in carpentry. The couple was able to move into an apartment, and Matthew made all the furniture they needed.

One night, while they were asleep, thieves broke into their apartment. They stole their furniture and most of their possessions. It was a huge loss. Matthew was shattered by the theft of the furniture. Sarah wept over the stolen wedding presents. They were thinking of leaving for home, when Sarah decided to spend the second gold coin on replacing the household items. The sale of the second coin made Sarah feel guilty, but not as guilty as selling the first one.

In the evenings and over the weekends Matthew made furniture, and sold it at markets and fairs. He had learned all he could from his employer and had the beginnings of a small business, but he struggled to buy the wood and other necessary supplies. Without much thought, Sarah sold the last coin to help him on his way.

It was around this time, that Sarah became pregnant with James and left her job. When James was weaned, he refused to take solids. She remembered the decorative spoon in the red box. James was attracted to the spoon's coloured handle and ate from it. From then on, she kept the spoon in the kitchen. Caring for James was exhausting, and she longed to return to work. Fortunately, a neighbour who loved children offered to care for him for a few hours each week. In gratitude, Sarah impulsively gave the kind woman her grandmother's silk scarf.

Eventually, the couple bought a modest house. During the move Sarah tossed the red leather box into a top cupboard. They had all they needed, and with their life more settled, Sarah had another child they called Phyllis.

In the early years after leaving home, she kept in touch with her parents by letter and occasional phone calls. As the months and years passed, she wrote to them less often and their conversations gradually became forced. Her sporadic correspondence with her sister ceased as well. Though she wrote to her parents to inform them about James' birth, they replied that they were too old and sick to travel. She had been away eleven years when her father died suddenly, but she did not attend the funeral. When her mother died four years later, she did not return to the farm either.

Once their children had left home, Matthew and Sarah spent barely any time together. While he carved wooden sculptures in his workroom, she cooked and sewed. Sarah was lonely and often thought of her family and the farm. All she had left were her memories and the few items in the red leather box. She realised then that her father had given her a message about the

importance of family ties. The box was her link with the past that she had not valued in her race to establish a new life in the city. After searching through all the cupboards, she eventually found it. Eagerly she opened it, kissed the family photo and gazed at it for a long time. She was relieved to find the silver dove and comb.

She felt guilty about her impulsiveness, but could do nothing about it. Instead of crying about her loss, she valued what was left. She bought an exquisite gold frame for the photograph and placed it on her bedside table. Once she had cleaned the brooch, it shone and its jeweled eye twinkled. Pinning it on her shirt, she admired it in the mirror. She told both her children about the box and about their family. She gave her daughter, who had inherited the family's auburn curly hair, the tortoise-shell comb.

Months later, Sarah visited her parent's graves in the village near the farm where she was raised.

I am convinced that love is one of the most powerful ingredients in stories that heal. Stories inspired by love take us beyond facts. They speak to our hearts and souls. They convey our deepest emotions of compassion, gratitude, and empathy.

In this collection of seventy, inspiring stories, Joan Zawatzky draws on her wealth of professional, counselling experience to share significant moments in the lives of ordinary people of all ages and diverse cultures, who have overcome obstacles, losses, and fears through understanding, self-belief, and embracing change.

Her nourishing, meaningful stories include tales about: Tarek, a quiet refugee, who saves a younger boy and his school from a fire; Emily, caught up in the frenzy of work, who discovers that a different approach makes each day more worthwhile; Jeremy, who courageously confronts his abusive father; Su Fang, who struggles to overcome severe adversity, and Greg, who unexpectedly meets his once feared school bully.

These are stories to savour. They celebrate the power of love, and the human spirit. *Stories of Love, Hope and Healing* is a book that reminds us that hope can be found in the smallest of moments, and that we can achieve harmony within, and in the world around us.

Stories of Love Hope and Healing follows Joan Zawatzky's non-fiction books, *Stop Family Anxiety*, and *Depression: Light at the End of the Tunnel*, and her novels, *The Scent of Oranges*, *The Elephant's Footprint* and *The Third Generation*.

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