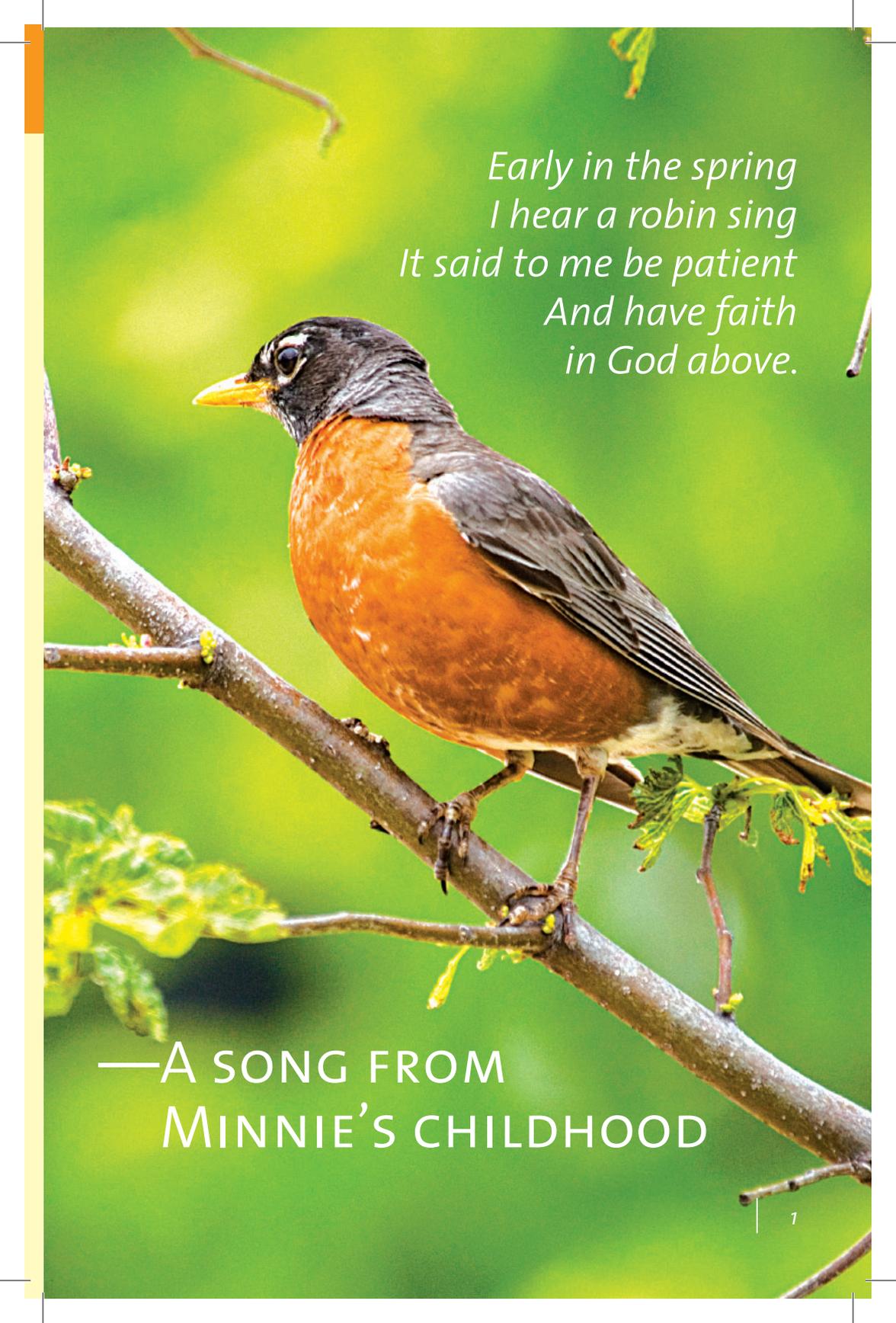


STEPPING OUT

By Minnie Dyson

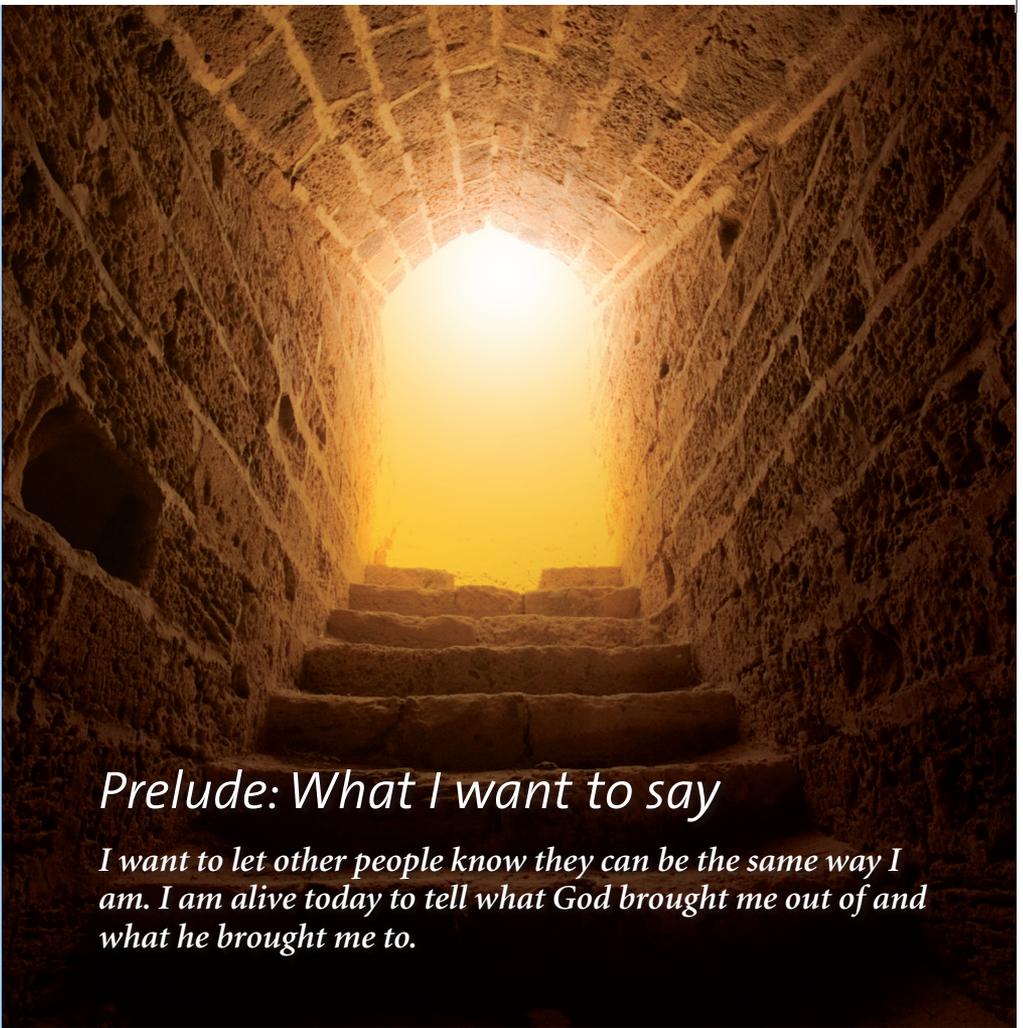


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*Early in the spring
I hear a robin sing
It said to me be patient
And have faith
in God above.*

—A SONG FROM
MINNIE'S CHILDHOOD



Prelude: What I want to say

I want to let other people know they can be the same way I am. I am alive today to tell what God brought me out of and what he brought me to.

To the young ladies and young men who have been raped: Hold your heads up high. Do not ever think you're nobody because you got raped. You're still somebody.

To the people who want to kill yourselves, you do not have to. God's got something for all of us to do.

If you think you're dirty, God can clean you up.

Do not give up. Jesus is on your side. You can do anything, he can deliver you out of any situation. Because look at me.

I know. Since age 5, I've had all this pain. But God let me know it was not my fault.

The people who raised me, they wouldn't let me go to school. I had to pick cotton, then go home and cook. The man, he messed with me all the time. When I was 15, I took \$16.50 that I saved up from picking cotton and went to the bus station. I came to Milwaukee. I was all alone.

People always said I'd never amount to anything but I did. I am a lady. I don't have to eat out of garbage cans anymore. I don't have to wash clothes by hand. I own a home. I feel good about myself.

I just thank God I did not lose my mind. I did not lose my self esteem.

I came to the Dominican Center in 1997. And that's when I found courage. I said, Sister Ann, I can't read. I can't talk that good. And I'm having a hard time. And I went to telling her what happened to me. And she got a pen and pencil. And she wrote it down.

I had got saved by that time, but I didn't get rid of it all right then and there. I had not talked about most of it before. And I got tired of the weight. It was weighting me down. I had to tell someone about it. So I told Sister Ann.

And I wrote a book, with Sister Ann helping.

That book was about everything that happened to me in my life. It was not a happy life. When I was a child I had no friends, nowhere to go. Not the way a kid is supposed to have a good life. I would walk along the railroad tracks and cry and wonder why all this was happening to me. Will I ever have a happy life? Boys would laugh at me and talk about me, and girls would, too. But I kept on going.

After the book, I felt brand new. I didn't have the pain anymore, God had released it from me. I felt brand new when I released that into this book. I was in my 40s.

I was hurting so bad when I came to Sister Ann but she didn't know it. A lot of people said to me after they read my book, "How could you be through all of this and be what you are today?" When I wrote that book, I was finally releasing all that stuff.

Sometimes now I think about it. It will come back. But I said no, you ain't gonna haunt me no more. I wash myself of that.

Now, I feel good about Minnie. I'm going to reach the goal. I stepped out of what I was going through. Now I am going to step out toward my goals for the future. I am going to step up, not back.

STEP ONE: SAVED

Ruby was in the barbeque place on Teutonia. I went in to get a dinner. She saw me and called me over. She said, “You have so many bad things going on in your life, but God can change that.” She invited me to church.

After three or four times going to church, I got saved.

I was tired of going through what I was going through. I kept holding on. I kept thinking, there has got to be something better. Like when I was little, I had nothing but the leftover crumbs. But I had to survive, so I ate them.

When I got saved, I felt so light on my feet—the message from St. John was given to me:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son. That whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life.

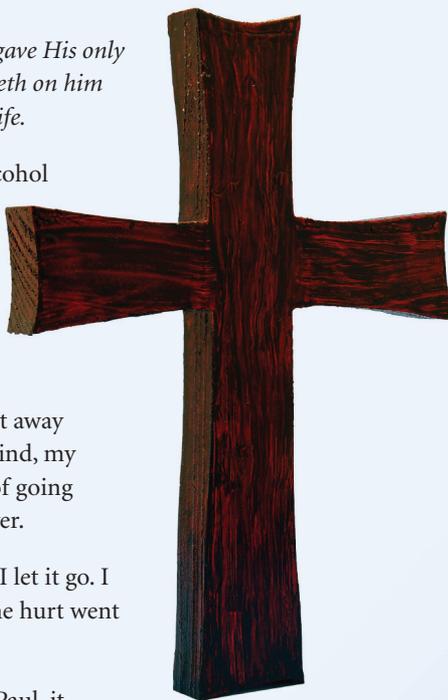
After that night I never touched alcohol or smoked again. After that night I never allowed men to use me again.

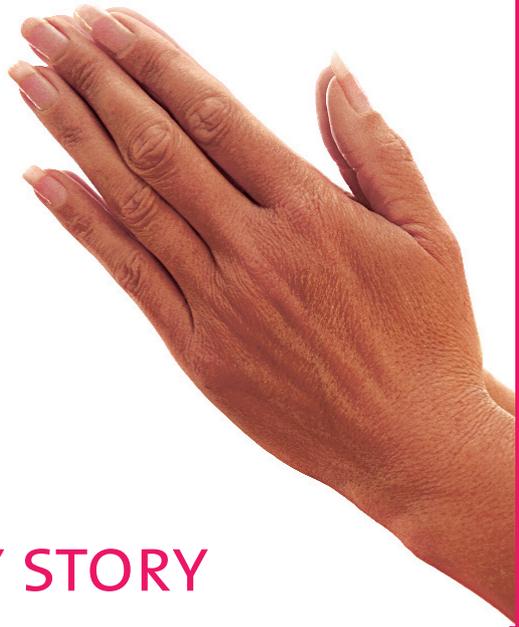
When I got saved, I stopped the pills and I stopped the alcohol.

He took the nightmares and all that away from me. I was about to lose my mind, my everything. I told God I was tired of going through the same pain over and over.

Before I got saved I was angry. But I let it go. I can talk about it now because all the hurt went into the book.

When I got saved I said to my son Paul, it wasn't your fault. He told me, I thank you, mamma, for not getting rid of me. I said, you were my baby, and both of us had to live with it.





STEP TWO: TELLING MY STORY

About a month after I got saved, I was at church with Ruby. The church was packed. I got up. When I stood up to testify, I felt so light, just so light. And I thank God for that. I told about the sexual abuse in my life. And I was saying, if it happens to you, don't bow your head down, it's not your fault. And you know what? Half of the people there went through the same things I did. And they were able to get up and tell what happened to them. About 15 women stood up. They were scared to talk about it. I see some of them now, in church, and they say God really worked it out for us.

They didn't know I went through that, and I didn't know they went through it.

You look at a person, and you do not know what that person can be. So you do not put them down. You do not know what they went through. I found that out myself.

When I had nightmares, I wasn't talking about it, I kept it to myself. I had stopped eating and everything.

When you're giving your testimony, you tell what God has done for you. If that had never happened to you, you would never have a testimony. Sometimes, things happen to you for a reason. God brought me out of everything. He was there for me when people were kicking and beating me, throwing me out in the snow. He kept me.

STEP THREE: TAKING PRIDE IN MYSELF

I took pride in myself. I nurtured my self esteem. I realized I was a pretty woman who could accomplish a lot of things. I decided to do something for Minnie because I believed in myself.

When I was little, I said, what is happening to me? I ain't never going to be nobody. I ate out of garbage cans, I ate leftovers, watermelons in the field, grapes that grew in the forest. That's what kept me alive. My clothes were too big, they hung off me, kids in the neighborhood would laugh at me.

When I got saved, I said, God, I am tired of people saying they're my friends and they're not. I have been hurt a lot of times by thinking people are my friends. God—*He's* my friend. *He's* my family. *He's* my everything. If you laugh and talk about me, that's you. I am going to hold my head up and not look down.

I am somebody. I am not the person they said I was going to be. "You're always going to be a bum." When you take pride in yourself, you've left everything behind and you've gone on in your life. You can do things you've never done before.

A lot of people look over me, like I don't know nothing, like I can't read. And they'll skip over me like I don't exist. But I take pride in myself. God can help me do anything.

If you walked around with your head down and thought about all the things that happened, you wouldn't be thinking of *you*.

I just had a birthday. I went to church that day, and I took myself to the mall, and walked around, and got a little lunch. And then I went home, and watched TV with the kids. One of my granddaughters, she gave me some balloons and a card.

I have never had a birthday party. But I have decided that I should put on my own birthday party. I'm going to get the kids to help, make some food, and have people over. I never thought of doing that before.



STEP FOUR: GETTING AN EDUCATION



When Roz and Libbie, two good friends, told me I could come to the Dominican Center to get my education, I decided to come and learn. I have been here ever since.

In 1997 when I came to the Center Sister Ann said, you know what, you can go to school here. So I did. And I surprised myself. They taught me my ABCs, they taught me how to read. At first I started off with some first-grade tapes. I memorized everything in my head. That's how I've been getting around all my life. I'd memorize. I'm on a highway going out of town, and I look at the signs: 94 east, 94 west. God, at least you have given me something. I know my way around. I can get all over the place. I know which bus to catch and not catch.

Sister Elise helped me with the bills. She showed me how to budget my money. She showed me a good way, too, I've been paying all my bills and buying food, too. And Sister Diana helped me get out of a bad situation with my house payments.

People can't use me like they used to because I know what is going on now. I thank God I can read a little. I'm good at arithmetic, I taught myself. I know how to budget money, pay my bills on time. If you mess with the bill money, you're gonna be *in* a mess. But if you have money after that, then you can use it for something else.

I am almost there. Next year I'll be graduating, and then I'll have to go to some big classes somewhere else, to get my GED. I'm doing good now. I can read more and I can write some of the words down.

If you just hold on, and believe in yourself, you can do it. Do not give up.

It's been hard. I tried to get jobs and they would not accept you without a GED. The only jobs I got were cleaning house, taking care of yards, taking care of kids, taking out the garbage.

Other jobs, they fired me when they heard I didn't have my GED.

There was a time when I didn't have no money a lot of days. I didn't have food. I

went on welfare and that helped me, but some days I didn't have food then, too.

Now I know how to budget and make a little food go a long way.

Be thankful for what you've got. If you've got one pair of pants, wash them every day and wear them. You can't run to the store and always buy this and that.

STEP FIVE: BUYING A HOME



I own a home. A big back yard, a front yard. God blessed me with it. God showed the devil I could do anything I want through His help. Everything I have got, I give God the glory. I thank Him, I really do. Look what I have got!

I moved to 23rd and Hampton. My kids were big then. I moved to a townhouse there.

Then they changed landlords and the same thing happened again. My kids couldn't play in the yard. The new landlady cussed me up. I kept the yard up, I kept the house up. All the kids played in the back, but mine couldn't. Then she asked me to move.

I prayed to the Lord, you have got to find me a home for my kids.

Someone at the Dominican Center said, well, my auntie has a house for sale. And Sister Ann helped me get that house.

It was close enough so my grandchildren could walk to school.

When I moved in, the lady—she was a crossing guard—she had left sodas in the fridge and cans of food. The kids couldn't wait, they had so much fun in that back yard. They said, Grandma, what are you crying for? I said, I am so happy.

I fixed supper, we ate, we sat around and watched TV.

I tell my grandkids, you just do what is right and God will fix the rest. I tell them, look what God has done for your Grandma. You can't be out there selling dope. If you put your trust in Jesus you can get any job you want.

I'm going to keep the house up so my grandkids and their kids can talk about it. When I pay it off, we can have some money to go traveling and, you know, have some fun.

STEP SIX: TAKING CARE OF MY GRANDKIDS

I said, God, they didn't ask to be here. Someone has to take care of them. I make sure they look nice, go to school, get an education so they can be somebody. One day I'm going to take them down south, visit places, go to Disney. But I say to them, Grandma can't do that right now, because there are bills to pay. I say, see? It's not easy to do all this, but God is on my side.

It's hard to take care of kids, but I stayed with it, and done it. The girls were kind of hard, they wouldn't listen to me. I used to say, Lord, I am doing all that I can for them, what am I doing wrong?

So I sat 'em down and I said, "Are you happy?"

"No, Grandma. Our daddy did our mamma wrong."

I said, "That doesn't make it right to do me wrong."

I told my granddaughters: Keep your legs closed and finish school and get an education and get married.

I had to put three of them in the foster home. I didn't want to do it, but I had to do something to keep them from getting killed. I didn't know one of them was having a baby.

After they left, I only had two girls at home and two boys. There wasn't any more cussing around. I raised my sons' two boys when he got killed. They're pretty nice boys.

I just love to see the babies doing their homework and nobody's messing with them. Leave the babies alone, let them enjoy their lives. Every time I see my grandchildren I put my arms around them and say I love you.

Now, they're all getting by. I said to them, pretty soon you're going to have to be on your own. The girls, they said, Grandma, we wished we would have listened to you, because you were telling us right.



STEP SEVEN: FORGIVENESS

Sometimes you can get to thinking of yourself, and somebody else needs help. To help somebody, that's a step you are taking...forgiveness.

Once when I went to see Florence—the lady that raised me down south—in the hospital, her daughter came. She told me things about her mother, that she had been raped and beaten as a little child. And I said to her, then why did she do these things to me? She said, because you were adopted. Well, that just does not make any sense. She had two daughters, and sons too, and she didn't let anything happen to them.

But I said, I love Florence anyway because, you know what? They did Jesus wrong, too, and He still loved them. Once, when Florence had her right mind, I said I forgive you. And she cussed me out and said I don't forgive you. And I said I still love you anyway.

At holidays, she would ask for food. One Thanksgiving I made her cheese and macaroni, and greens, and corn bread, sweet potato pie, cake. Every holiday she would ask me to cook and bring it to her in the home.

They're feeding her out of a tube now, and she's breathing through a tube in her neck.

None of her kids did right by her. Her son who raped me, he's dead now.

I forgive both of them.





STEP EIGHT: A REAL JOB

In June 2008, that was the first real job interview I ever had. And I did the interview myself. They offered me the job, a part-time job. It's at a hotel, cleaning rooms.

The lady, she showed me around, how to fix up the room. I told her, if there is someone in the room, you do not look in the drawers, you respect their privacy. If there's something they left on the table, you dust around it. She said, you are good. She said, we are glad to have you on board, we'll see you next Wednesday and Thursday and Friday.

I felt good on the inside. I said, look at me! I got my own cart, my own uniform with a name tag. I met all the bosses that run the hotel. They said, we welcome you.

With a nice attitude, people accept you more.

STEP NINE: WALKING INTO THE FUTURE

I am doing the things people never thought I could.

I used to look back, but now I am looking forward with what I want to do in life, do the things I want to do.

I want to get on the bus and know where I'm going. Get me a hotel room.

I want to see my grandkids grow up. I want to see them get good jobs and be happy and be somebody, then they can come and pick up Grandma and take her somewhere. We'd all be one big happy family. I would like this.

I take care of the kids and wash their clothes and make sure the bills are paid, and I don't go any further than the front porch and the church. I want to have a vacation fund so when I want to go, I can get up and go. I would like to sightsee and do different things and bring back souvenirs.

I want to travel all over the world and see how the rest of the world lives. While I'm traveling I want to tell the people about my testimony. How I learned how to read and to pay my own bills. How I can go to the grocery store and buy what I want when I used to couldn't. I can go to the store and buy clothes when I used to couldn't. Fix myself up and carry myself as a lady.

I want to get my GED. Have my car, have a license and good insurance.

One day I look forward to getting married again and this time the man is going to love me and treat me the way I want to be treated. If you feel good about yourself, people will treat you good, too. And treat other people the way you want to be treated.

I save. I budget. I know where I am going.

I make sure I save ahead of time, and I do not touch that. And one day I will have enough for our vacation.

And then I'll set back on the beach one day and look around, and enjoy myself.

I'm free. And the hurt and the pain are gone.



AUTHOR—MINNIE DYSON

This book is the author's own story based on personal memories and represents her understanding of life experiences. It is written in the author's own words with the help of a life story coach and is intended to instruct, enrich and inspire. Professional Dimensions and the story coaches assume no responsibility for the contents of the story or the accuracy of the facts and events discussed therein.

