



More Taste Berries for Teens: Inspirational Short Stories and Encouragement on Life, Love, Friendship and Tough Issues (Taste Berries Series)

By Bettie B. Youngs, Youngs Jennifer

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Like its best-selling predecessor, this book deftly combines teen contributions and responses with the commentary and sensitive advice of coauthors Bettie B. Youngs, Ph.D., Ed.D., and Jennifer Leigh Youngs, showing teens that we each can make life better through our love and compassion.

This book will focus on the themes similar to the ones handled in the first volume and the journal, including: self-worth; friendship; love and relationships; parents and teens; how to create an attitude for life success; how to decide what to do in life; how to give, share and make a difference; and how to cope with stress-filled and embarrassing moments.

As with the other volumes in this series, teens are sure to find that this book will help them connect with their innermost feelings, identify their fondest dreams and turn them into reality, and, most important, recognize that they are not alone in what they encounter or how they feel.

More Taste Berries for Teens is sure to become a treasured companion and trusted guide to all its readers as they journey toward making their lives better and brighter.

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Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #572332 in Books
- Published on: 2000-09-01
- Released on: 2000-09-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.50" h x .82" w x 5.50" l, 1.10 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 360 pages

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Editorial Review

About the Author

BETTIE B. YOUNGS, PH.D., ED.D., a former Teacher of the Year, is a professional speaker and the internationally renowned author of nineteen books translated into twenty-nine languages. Along with her daughter, Jennifer Leigh Youngs, she is the coauthor of the runaway bestseller, *Taste Berries for Teens: Inspirational Short Stories and Encouragement on Life, Love, Friendship and Tough Issues*; and *Taste Berries for Teens Journal: My Thoughts on Life, Love and Making a Difference*. She has appeared frequently on CNN, NBC Nightly News and Oprah. The Washington Post, USA Today, Redbook, McCall's, Family Circle, Working Woman, U.S. News and World Report and Parents Magazine all have recognized her work. Her acclaimed books include *Safeguarding Your Teenager from the Dragons of Life*; *Taste-Berry Tales*; the Pulitzer Prize-nominated *Gifts of the Heart*; and the award-winning *Values from the Heartland*.

JENNIFER LEIGH YOUNGS, a former Miss Teen California finalist and a Rotary International Exchange Scholar, is nationally recognized speaker and workshop presenter. She serves on a number of advisory boards for teens, and is the international youth coordinator for Airline Ambassadors, an international organization affiliated with the United Nations and dedicated to involving young people in programs worldwide to build cross-cultural friendships and deliver humanitarian aid to those in need around the globe. Jennifer is also the author of *Feeling Great, Looking Hot and Loving Yourself!: Health, Fitness and Beauty for Teens*; *Goal-Setting Skills for Young Adults*; and *A Stress Management Guide for Teens*. The Youngses are based out of Del Mar, California.

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The Last Gift

Have you ever conceived what it would be like to know that you are dying? My grandmother had to think about it every day for three months. I can hardly fathom how hard that must be.

One day she was healthy and then, like a thief in the night, the next day she was ambushed with a cancer that has no cure. When the doctors diagnosed my grandmother, with a great deal of compassion they informed her family that all we could do was prepare a peaceful exit for her. Like a cruel sentence, they announced the cancer was "terminal"; she would be granted two to five months if she took chemotherapy treatments, less without them. Such a blatant word, "terminal"?as in the end. No more. Over. Finished. Final. Gone.

When I heard this bleak report on the status of her health, I remember thinking, "Where are all these advanced medical breakthroughs, anyway?" I was so angry. My grandmother: a soul mate. This loving and giving person in my life who loves me, believes in me, supports me in my decisions?and unlike any other, ever so gently and lovingly helps me see the errors of my ways. My fan. A *huge* fan. Someone who makes me my favorite food at any time of night or day when I am visiting her. Someone always with a twinkle in her eyes when she looks at me. Why are we boasting about all our scientific and technological advances when there isn't even a cure for my grandmother's type of cancer, when the cherished mother of my mother can be taken from me as quickly as poof, and she's gone? This is a question without an answer?even in this

"new millennium"!

And so my grandmother returned to her own home to be with those she spent a lifetime nurturing: her sweetheart and husband of fifty-five years, and her family of six children, seventeen grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren. Only now we would be the nurturers. It was my grandmother who needed looking after. Day by day by day. And then hour by hour by hour. And in the end, minute by minute.

Not that I ever gave up hope. I continued to hope when there was no hope at all. At first I searched for cures everywhere?even experimental treatment programs outside her doctor's care. But a search from one end of the country to the other revealed that there was nothing we could do for the type and late stage of her cancer. I watched helplessly, trying to disguise the hurt and loss I felt, even trying to give her my energy so she might garner strength from it. But all I could do was watch over this remarkably loving and Christian woman. Even in her profound illness, my grandmother remained a magnificent person: graceful, beautiful, kind, concerned for others.

She was always so selfless. I watched now as she lay helpless to affect that which was strangling the breath out of her, dependent on others to care for her, and was reminded about all those times when she watched over me when I, too, was helpless and completely dependent on others for everything. How I cherish her.

There is so much to cherish. All my life I knew her. Twenty-five years of having a soul-mate relationship. It would be impossible to tell someone all that she meant to me, there was so much laughter, playfulness, praying together and all the many events?big and small?where Grandma sat, hands in lap, beaming at me, one of many adored and adoring grandchildren. I felt like her favorite, always, but in my heart I knew she loved us all the same, and that all of us felt as if we were each her most favored. Her love was so profoundly unconditional. How will I ever file all the memories? We built so many of them together, she and I. They are among the fondest times in my life. In fact, my entire life is feathered with such memories.

How shall I pick a favorite memory to remind me of her ever-encompassing spirit in my life? Perhaps it is the nature walks we took wherein no flower, rock or feather was too inconsequential to touch, talk over and give thanks for. Our conversations were as rich as our love for each other?always we held hands, and even as one of us would stoop to pick a flower or a feather, never did our fingers lose touch of the one we loved so much. I remember the time when I was a very small girl, walking hand in hand with her, when we found yet another feather from an old gray wild turkey. "Look!" I exclaimed, and my delight was her own, as she marveled aloud over its beauty?turning it this way then that in the light, and pointing out its shimmering colors and intricacies. Then we spoke of feathers and of wings and of all sorts of creatures that were winged?from the old wild turkey, to the angels in heaven. My grandmother left a trail of memories longer than the trail of feathers discarded by that old gray turkey. How will I ever sort out these memories, categorize them, harbor them and keep them safe? I want to. Forever!

I knew my grandmother's fate was drawing near. And I was listless, anxious, sad and happy, too, knowing that my grandmother was going soon to journey home to God. One day as my grandmother lay so very ill, I began to look at her things, and in an old storage chest at the top of the basement steps, tucked behind old flashlights and an old tin with loose kernels of corn and hats for winter's chill, found one of the feathers we had collected on a walk together. Wrapped in delicate paper?and memorialized in her sensual handwriting?were the words, "Jennifer?"84." Remembering the many soulful conversations between my grandmother and me, and remembering how she loved feathers?certainly feathers had given wings to so many of our nature-walk conversations?I took the feather and, along with a beautiful blooming bouquet of fresh flowers, presented them to her.

On this day, she oohed at the beauty of the flowers and then looked at the feather, considering the feather the

most pleasing of the two offerings. I was about to remind her that a feather from a huge wild turkey was among the last gifts she gave to me before she fell ill just weeks before. But in her gaze I realized she knew these words were about to be spoken, and instead, she lowered her head and smiled knowingly. So, I held the large plume proudly in front of me and like a child exclaimed, "Grandma, look what I've found!" She lit up with joy and as if transported back to the time when I was a child and she was much younger herself, declared, "Oh, Angelface! It's the best one we ever did find!" And then, tenderly, looking over toward my grandfather, she asked, "Everett, have you ever seen such a splendid feather?" My grandfather acknowledged the deeper meaning of the wild feather by responding, "A genuine family heirloom!" *Yes, she is*, I thought. My grandmother will always be an heirloom etched within my heart. An heirloom as priceless as the most valuable treasure passed down within a family, a treasure that brings to mind memories of love and connection.

Still, the most grand and priceless heirloom of all that my grandmother left is not an outward token, but an imprint etched in my heart of the precious power and grace of her life as a simple and noble person. This is a woman who quietly and staunchly began the foundation of our family. She created the spirit of the Burres family home. For more than half a century, she remained sweetheart to a husband she truly loved.

Yet another facet of this heirloom is a deep and abiding faith. My grandmother loved God and lived her life around her uncompromised spiritual principles. Aside from living these principles as a pillar of character within a community she cared about so much, she was also a shepherdess of Christian ministries the world over. Only after her death did my family discover that my grandmother had been supporting nearly thirty missionaries for nearly two decades, and over time, some twenty orphaned children from all corners of the world.

Always the eternal optimist, always the caretaker, always the nurturer, my grandmother gave so many the gift of love, the word of God, and a feeling they had met an angel, which I'm sure she is.

As I left my grandmother's graveside with feather in hand, I thought about how difficult life will seem without her. And of the vacuum that her passing has left within my life. Perhaps it's because the legacy she leaves behind is her courageous example of just how pure and simple and unconditional her love was.

As I look at the beautiful gray feather, I realize that there will be many days ahead of me when I'll cry over having to part for now with a soul that knew my own soul so well, and loved me so much.

The beautiful feather sits now in a vase, lonely, as I am. Yet I find comfort in this heirloom, too. Maybe it's because the feather is more symbolic than I had first imagined. I now stare at the feather and think of how my grandmother always gave me wings to fly to my greatest potential. And so feathered with her love, and graced by knowing of her eternal life, I am now able to gently let go of some of my pain. A little, at least.

Jennifer Leigh Youngs

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Ted Bryant:

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