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心灵鸡汤

女人心语

Chicken Soup

for the

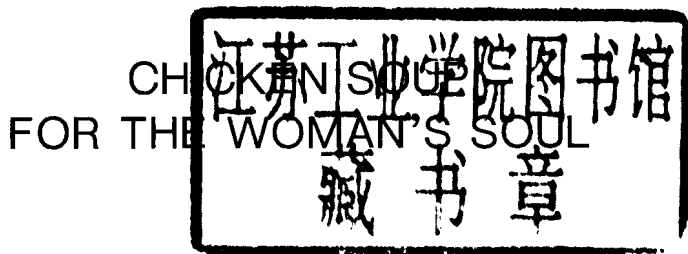
Woman's Soul

With Stories By:
Oprah Winfrey
Maya Angelou
Dolly Parton
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Kathie Lee Gifford
And Many More

101 Stories to Open the
Hearts and Rekindle the
Spirits of Women

心灵鸡汤

——女人心语



Jennifer Read Hawthorne Marci Shimoff

*101 Stories to Open the Hearts and Rekindle
the Spirits of Women*



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ON LOVE

*The best and most beautiful things in the
world cannot be seen or even touched.
They must be felt with the heart.*

Helen Keller



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The White Gardenia

Every year on my birthday, from the time I turned 12, one white gardenia was delivered anonymously to me at my house. There was never a card or note, and calls to the florist were in vain because the purchase was always made in cash. After a while, I stopped trying to discover the identity of the sender. I just delighted in the beauty and heady perfume of that one magical, perfect white flower nestled in folds of soft pink tissue paper.

But I never stopped imagining who the sender might be. Some of my happiest moments were spent in daydreams about someone wonderful and exciting, but too shy or eccentric to make known his or her identity. In my teen years, it was fun to speculate that the sender might be a boy I had a crush on, or even someone I didn't know who had noticed me.

My mother often contributed to my speculations. She'd ask me if there was someone for whom I had done a special kindness, who might be showing appreciation anonymously. She reminded me of the times when I'd been riding my bike and our neighbor drove up with her car full of groceries and children. I always helped her unload the car and made sure the children didn't run into the road. Or maybe the mystery sender was the old man across the street. I often retrieved

his mail during the winter, so he wouldn't have to venture down his icy steps.

My mother did her best to foster my imagination about the gardenia. She wanted her children to be creative. She also wanted us to feel cherished and loved, not just by her, but by the world at large.

When I was 17, a boy broke my heart. The night he called for the last time, I cried myself to sleep. When I awoke in the morning, there was a message scribbled on my mirror in red lipstick; "Heartily know, when half-gods go, the gods arrive." I thought about that quotation from Emerson for a long time, and I left it where my mother had written it until my heart healed. When I finally went for the glass cleaner, my mother knew that everything was all right again.

But there were some hurts my mother couldn't heal. A month before my high school graduation, my father died suddenly of a heart attack. My feelings ranged from simple grief to abandonment, fear, distrust and overwhelming anger that my dad was missing some of the most important events in my life. I became completely uninterested in my upcoming graduation, the senior-class play and the prom—events that I had worked on and looked forward to. I even considered staying home to attend college instead of going away as I had planned because it felt safer.

My mother, in the midst of her own grief, wouldn't hear of me missing out on any of these things. The day before my father died, she and I had gone shopping for a prom dress and had found a spectacular one—yards and yards of dotted Swiss in red, white and blue. Wearing it made me feel like Scarlett O'Hara. But it was the wrong size, and when my father died the next day, I forgot all about the dress.

My mother didn't. The day before the prom, I found that

dress waiting for me—in the right size. It was draped majestically over the living room sofa, presented to me artistically and lovingly. I may not have cared about having a new dress, but my mother did.

She cared how we children felt about ourselves. She imbued us with a sense of the magic in the world, and she gave us the ability to see beauty even in the face of adversity.

In truth, my mother wanted her children to see themselves much like the gardenia—lovely, strong, perfect, with an aura of magic and perhaps a bit of mystery.

My mother died when I was 22, only 10 days after I was married. That was the year the gardenias stopped coming.

Marsha Arons

Words from the Heart

The bitterest tears shed over graves are for words left unsaid and deeds left undone.

Harriet Beecher Stowe

Most people need to hear those “three little words”. Once in a while, they hear them just in time.

I met Connie the day she was admitted to the hospice ward, where I worked as a volunteer. Her husband, Bill, stood nervously nearby as she was transferred from the gurney to the hospital bed. Although Connie was in the final stages of her fight against cancer, she was alert and cheerful. We got her settled in. I finished marking her name on all the hospital supplies she would be using, then asked if she needed anything.

“Oh yes,” she said, “would you please show me how to use the TV? I enjoy the soaps so much and I don’t want to get behind on what’s happening.” Connie was a romantic. She loved soap operas, romance novels and movies with a good love story. As we became acquainted, she confided how frustrating it was to be married 32 years to a man who often

called her "a silly woman".

"Oh, I know Bill loves me," she said, "but he has never been one to say he loves me, or send cards to me." She sighed and looked out the window at the trees in the courtyard. "I'd give anything if he'd say 'I love you,' but it's just not in his nature."

Bill visited Connie every day. In the beginning, he sat next to the bed while she watched the soaps. Later, when she began sleeping more, he paced up and down the hallway outside her room. Soon, when she no longer watched television and had fewer waking moments, I began spending more of my volunteer time with Bill.

He talked about having worked as a carpenter and how he liked to go fishing. He and Connie had no children, but they'd been enjoying retirement by traveling, until Connie got sick. Bill could not express his feelings about the fact that his wife was dying.

One day, over coffee in the cafeteria, I got him on the subject of women and how we need romance in our lives; how we love to get sentimental cards and love letters.

"Do you tell Connie you love her?" I asked (knowing his answer), and he looked at me as if I was crazy.

"I don't have to," he said. "She *knows* I do!"

"I'm sure she knows," I said, reaching over and touching his hands—rough, carpenter's hands that were gripping the cup as if it were the only thing he had to hang onto—"but she needs to *hear* it, Bill. She needs to hear what she has meant to you all these years. Please think about it."

We walked back to Connie's room. Bill disappeared inside, and I left to visit another patient. Later, I saw Bill sitting by the bed. He was holding Connie's hand as she slept. The date was February 12.

Two days later I walked down the hospice ward at noon. There stood Bill, leaning up against the wall in the hallway, staring at the floor. I already knew from the head nurse that Connie had died at 11 A. M.

When Bill saw me, he allowed himself to come into my arms for a long hug. His face was wet with tears and he was trembling. Finally, he leaned back against the wall and took a deep breath.

“I have to say something,” he said. “I have to say how good I feel about telling her.” He stopped to blow his nose. “I thought a lot about what you said, and this morning I told her how much I loved her ... and loved being married to her. You shoulda seen her smile!”

I went into the room to say my own good-bye to Connie. There, on the bedside table, was a large Valentine card from Bill. You know, the sentimental kind that says, “To my wonderful wife ... I love you.”

Bobbie Lippman

Mama's Soup Pot

There are too many treasures in life we take for granted, the worth of which we don't fully realize until they're pointed out to us in some unexpected way. So it was with Mama's soup pot.

I can still see it sitting on the stove in all its chipped white-and-blue-enameled glory, its contents bubbling, steam rising as if from an active volcano. When I entered the back porch, the aroma was not only mouthwatering but reassuring. Whether Mama was standing over the pot stirring with a long wooden spoon or not, I knew I was home.

There was no recipe for her minestrone soup. It was always a work in progress. It had been so since her girlhood in the Piemonte mountains of northern Italy, where she learned its secret from her nonna (grandma), who had inherited it from generations of nonnas.

For our large immigrant family, Mama's soup guaranteed we would never go hungry. It was a simmering symbol of security. Its recipe was created spontaneously from what was in the kitchen. And we could judge the state of our family economy by its contents. A thick brew with tomatoes, pasta, beans, carrots, celery, onion, corn and meat indicated things were going well with the Buscaglias. A watery soup denoted meager times. And never was food thrown out. That was a

sin against God. Everything ended up in the minestrone pot.

Its preparation was sacred to Mama. To her, cooking was a celebration of God's providence. Each potato, each shred of chicken was placed in the pot with grateful thanks. I think of Mama whenever I read Proverbs: "She gets up while it is still dark; she provides food for her family ... Her children arise, and call her blessed."

At one time, however, Mama's soup pot became a source of embarrassment to me, for I feared it would cost me a new friend I had made at school. Sol was a thin, dark-haired boy, and an unusual pal for me because his father was a doctor and they lived in the best part of town. Often Sol invited me to his home for dinner. The family had a cook in a white uniform who worked in a kitchen of gleaming chrome and shining utensils. The food was good, but I found it bland, lacking the heartiness of my home fare served from flame-blackened pots. Moreover, the atmosphere matched the food. Everything was so formal. Sol's mother and father were polite, but conversation around the table was stilted and subdued. And no one hugged! The closest I saw Sol get to his father was a handshake.

In our family, warm hugs were a constant — men, women, boys and girls — and if you didn't kiss your mother, she demanded: "Whatsa matter, you sick?"

But at that time in my life, all this was an embarrassment.

I had known Sol would like to eat dinner at our house, but that was the last thing I wanted. My family was so different. No other kids had such pots on their stoves, nor did they have a mama whose first action upon seeing you enter the house was to sit you down with a spoon and bowl.

"People in America don't do things like that," I tried to convince Mama.

“Well, I’m not people,” was her proud retort. “I’m Rosina. Only crazy people don’t want my minestrone.”

Finally Sol pointedly asked if he could come to our house. I had to say yes. I knew nothing would make Mama happier. But I was in a state of anxiety. Eating with my family would turn Sol off completely, I believed.

“Mama, why can’t we have some American food like hamburgers or fried chicken?”

She fixed me with a stony glare and I knew better than to ask again.

The day Sol came over I was a nervous wreck. Mama and the other nine family members welcomed him with embraces and slaps on the back.

Soon we were sitting at the heavy, deeply stained and ornately carved table that was Papa’s pride and joy. It was covered with an ostentatious, bright oilcloth.

And sure enough, after Papa asked the blessing, we were instantly faced with bowls of soup.

“Eh, Sol,” Mama asked, “you know what this is?”

“Soup?” Sol responded.

“No soup,” Mama said emphatically. “It’s *minestrone*!” She then launched into a long, animated explanation of the power of minestrone; how it cured headaches, colds, heartaches, indigestion, gout and liver ailments.

After feeling Sol’s muscles, Mama convinced him that the soup would also make him strong, like the Italian-American hero Charles Atlas. I cringed, convinced that this would be the last time I would ever see my friend Sol. He would certainly never return to a home with such eccentric people, odd accents and strange food.

But to my amazement, Sol politely finished his bowl and then asked for two more. “I like it a lot,” he said, slurping.

When we were saying our good-byes, Sol confided, “You sure have a great family. I wish my mom could cook that good.” Then he added, “Boy, are you lucky!”

Lucky? I wondered, as he walked down the street waving and smiling.

Today I know how lucky I was. I know that the glow Sol experienced at our table was much more than the physical and spiritual warmth of Mama’s minestrone. It was the unalloyed joy of a family table where the real feast was love.

Mama died a long time ago. Someone turned off the gas under the minestrone pot the day after Mama was buried, and a glorious era passed with the flame. But the godly love and assurance that bubbled amidst its savory ingredients still warms my heart today.

Sol and I continued our friendship through the years. I was the best man at his wedding. Not long ago I visited his house for dinner. He hugged all his children and they hugged me. Then his wife brought out steaming bowls of soup. It was chicken soup, thick with vegetables and chunks of meat.

“Hey, Leo,” Sol asked, “do you know what this is?”

“Soup?” I responded smiling.

“Soup!” he huffed. “This is *chicken soup!* Cures colds, headaches, indigestion. Good for your liver!” Sol winked.

I felt I was home again.

Leo Buscaglia