

Life's a **JOURNAL**

[a spiral-bound account of a life being lived]

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Life's Anecdotes & Assiduities



My precious girl—comic relief and avid quilter—likes to say that she was born with a needle in her hand. I, the woman who gave birth to her, would have to agree.

By the age of 4, her desire to put stitches into the church's sewing circle projects was palpable, and my sister and I often allowed our Littles to help, always (thankfully) remembering to remove the errant tacks before the next week's meeting!

Anyone who has spent time with my girl knows that she carries with her, always, her hand-quilting paraphernalia, and has, to date, more than a dozen quilts in her collection, each one so cozy and exquisite and adorning every bed in her house—oftentimes two or three deep!

(she's still) Keeping me in

STITCHES

FOR MY GIRL ON HER BIRTHDAY

Your smile and laughter and everything else
about you is lovely, and in spite of myself
I can't help but beam and feel proud, in a way,
you're my daughter and best friend—
30 years to the day!

As diverse as different yet two peas in a pod:
Love MDTs, POG, Mitford, and God.
Old books and sunsets and picnics and flowers
Reading past bedtime—
both silly night owls.

Acute DIY-ers, we shop at the Village
and scavenge the dump for pearls and pillage.
Share vacations, and sore feet, watch classics and remakes:
cry in all the right places, then can't sleep
for the headaches!

I'm so thankful for you,
what a treasure you've been!
Whether one year or sixteen or twenty plus ten.
I can't help but smile and say it again—

You're a true kindred spirit
and my very best friend!

(from Mum, 2018)

A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF WALTER KITTY

An Original Story



Chapter Two—Holiday Hullabaloo



As the wind-blown snow swirled in spirals outside the window next to Mrs. King's chair and the logs crackled in the fireplace grate and the wall clock chimed 2 o'clock in the afternoon, something woke Walter, mid nap. He sat up, yawned and stretched. Mrs. King was still sleeping soundly while unconsciously pulling her sweater a little closer—the fire having burned down and the thermometer having dropped significantly since morning.

It was the twenty-third of December and Walter was beginning to realize that something very special was imminent. First of all, Mrs. King had been on her feet much more in the last few days and busy with all sorts of preparations—tidying the upstairs rooms, baking cookies, and stringing up her mail in the front entrance hallway. It was only the very best of her daily mail, mind you; beautiful birthday cards, obviously for Someone so special that even Mrs. King, ailing as she was, felt compelled to expend time and energy readying for a party. Walter was curious. And now, this morning, before heading out the door to work at the paper mill, Mr. King had dragged in a large box from the garage, containing an evergreen tree covered in brightly coloured lights. Walter's curiosity was almost certain to get the better of him, yet.

The tree, now standing in the large front bay window with all its warm lights twinkling in the nearly-darkened room and its glass globe balls casting an iridescent glow on the walls and ceiling, was fascinating in the extreme. Walter wanted to climb that tree. He wanted to climb that tree more than anything he had ever wanted to do in all of his short existence.

Knock, knock, knock.

Hearing the sound at the door and becoming fully awake, Walter bounded from Mrs. King's lap, waking her in the process. It took a few more knocks at the door for Mrs. King to realize that she needed to get up and

answer it, which she then did. Miss Flora (for that is what everyone in the neighbourhood called Florence Goldblum), the spry and affable, if somewhat eccentric, 93-year-old neighbour from next door, stood on the stoop in the swirling snow, wrapped from head to toe in fur—muffed cap, long coat, and ankle-high boots that made her feet seem to be wearing hedgehogs. Her reading glasses perched on the very end of her nose, looking very much like they were glued there; and an unusually large leather purse hung from her left elbow, weighing the small elderly lady down on that side.

Mrs. King quickly came to her senses and, pulling her neighbour inside, closed the door against the sudden winter storm. Miss Flora was chuckling as she put down her heavy purse and began removing the furry outerwear, all the while explaining the reason for her visit: As she had driven by the King's house, on her way home from an appointment at the coiffeurs (Miss Flora not being one to cancel an appointment due to anything as trivial as inclement weather) she couldn't help but notice the Christmas tree in the front window, and, though, of course, she wouldn't even *think* of such a thing as putting up a tree for just herself—what with the stiffness in her back and the rheumatism affecting her hands; such a nuisance these days!—she still did love to see one when she had the chance, and, Oh! but she hoped that she was by no means imposing by dropping in so unexpectedly.

Naturally, Mrs. King assured her friend that there was no imposition and that a warm cup of tea with a dear neighbour was precisely what the intemperate afternoon had forecast. So, while the two women made their way to the kitchen for tea and a plate of freshly-baked gingersnap cookies, Walter, losing interest, for the moment, in the fascinating tree in the window, was drawn to the large leather purse that Miss Flora had left by the door. It certainly had an interesting smell to it. And was it . . . was it *moving*?!

Curiouser and curiouser, Walter made his way around the purse and, after giving it a couple swats with his paw, the purse began to not only move, but to cough and spit, too! The more Walter swatted, the more that purse rocked and coughed. Suddenly, the purse flew open and a furry grey thing, looking to Walter very like a cat in a rabbit suit, bounded straight up in the air, landing on Walter's tail! A cry of terror from Walter and a lot more coughing and spitting from whatever this critter actually was, proved to be only the introduction to a calamitous chase that took the two 'round and 'round the small room, with Walter barely in the lead.



By the time Mrs. King and Miss Flora guessed that there was indeed a scuffle of some sort happening in the front room, Walter was nowhere to be seen. And Miss Flora's chinchilla—newly acquired that morning and an impromptu purchase from the pet store adjacent to the coiffeurs—was discovered underneath the tree in the window and looking, for all intents and purposes, triumphantly pleased.

Miss Flora, now remembering her new pet and her forgotten resolve to head straight home with it, apologized profusely. She then introduced the Chinchilla—whom she affectionately named Morty, in honour of her husband, dearly departed—to Mrs. King, who quite agreeably welcomed the cute little rodent to the neighbourhood, planting a kiss on Morty's soft little head. Tea now finished and snow storm waning, Miss Flora was back in her furs and 'hedgehogs' and making her way home, a large leather purse, again, hanging from her left elbow and weighing her down on that side.

Somewhat wearied by the recent excitement, Mrs. King plopped back into her chair; she would sit still for just a bit before beginning supper. She looked around the room, expecting Walter to come from hiding and join her for a quick nap. But still, no Walter to be seen. Eventually, and only a very short while after Mrs. King's eyes had closed, a very distinct and plaintive meowing began from the direction of the bay window, from the vicinity of the Christmas tree, and from a certain branch precariously near the top. Walter had, indeed, conquered that most fascinating monument, if at the moment he felt nothing in the way of a conqueror!

After a kind and compassionate rescue, a warm bowl of milk, and a quick nap on dear Mrs. King's amiable lap, Walter began to forget his troubles and trauma of the early afternoon, deciding that yet another adventure with that tree—on his own terms this time, however—would be just the thing.



MERRY CHRISTMAS



good Crafternoon!

Even an avid crafter might perhaps, on occasion, need something to do with their hands that won't involve pulling out supplies and cluttering the kitchen table.

So, why not spend an afternoon creating origami? Indeed, the world will be origami-ing along with you, as you participate in the official [World Origami Days!](#)

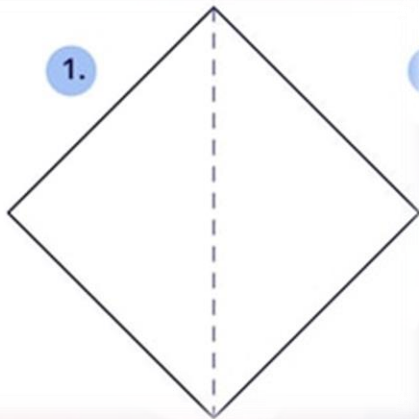
No joking!!

A quick Youtube search will pull up more tutorials than I have minutes in the afternoon!

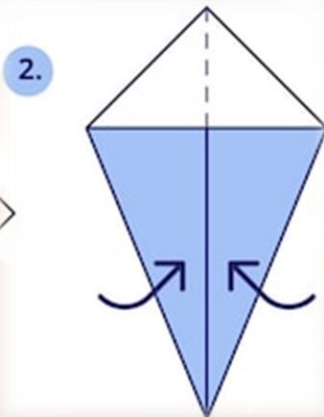
All you need is a stack of paper—white, coloured, new, used—news print and magazine pages will work. And if you're feeling that your creations need a purpose, you could make a mobile, hang it above your desk, and catch some of the dust that might otherwise fall on your keyboard tomorrow, while you're back, crafting, at the kitchen table.

easy

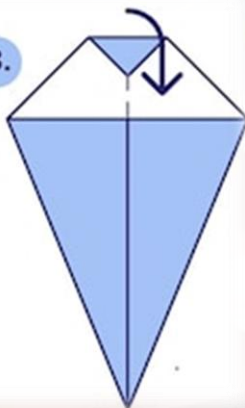
ORIGAMI WHALE STEP BY STEP



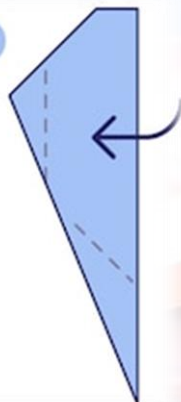
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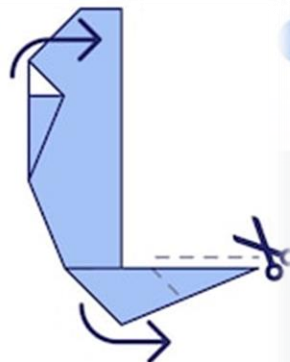
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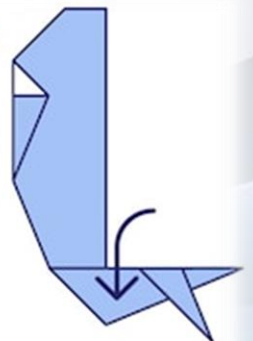
4.



5.



6.



Reading the Classics



THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME

By Victor Hugo

I may have been expecting too much.

Since I read Hugo's *Les Misérables* previously, it set the bar really high. Believed by many to be one of the greatest novels of the 19th century, I was understandably eager to read about the Hunchback, too.

Now, I was going to claim being too busy with late-season harvest to take time for this—and the present state of my house would have certainly attested to that. However, I had finished reading this story several weeks before I could bring myself to analyze what I had read, never mind putting it on paper. In fact, I can't honestly call what I have written a review; it's more of an opinion, really.

And with so many hours invested in this novel, I would love to be able to say that it's a must-read.

Alas, I cannot.

I found it quite appalling, really, and, while not having seen the Disney film for myself, I can only imagine what the writers must have done with it to make it even vaguely appropriate for children.

I kept reading and reading and reading (it's a BIG book), waiting for something good and *right* to happen, or at the least to come upon one of Hugo's meaty discourses on history or Christian virtue. He does stray a bit with "this will kill that," meaning "the press will kill the church" or "printing will kill architecture" or "the book will kill the edifice;" However, it doesn't go anywhere profound or even quote-worthy. Apparently, the original French title of the novel is *Notre Dame de Paris*, which is far more accurate to the dominant theme of the cathedral's architecture. Having visited Paris myself—having climbed the spiral staircase to the top of the towers, taken in the city views from that pinnacle, and admired the structure supporting the massive bell—I could at least appreciate *some* connection to the tale.

Nevertheless, I was disappointed on both counts, as the good and profundity which I sought absolutely escaped me.

The story itself is fascinating, for sure—its author being a master of words and imagery, to say nothing of setting, character development, and plot. I enjoyed it for all of that; nevertheless, I cannot say that this piece of literature made me better for having read it, nor would I necessarily recommend it—a story beset with tragedy, gore, perversion, and then, for good measure, more tragedy.

On learning that *The Hunchback* was written more than three decades before *Les Miserables*, I can only conclude that the author experienced a profound encounter with God somewhere during that time. Naught else, in my estimation, could account for the discrepancy between these novels.

So, while I'm not going to give a recommendation, I *am* going to read a few other reviews and catch someone else's perspective. Who knows? Perhaps something worthwhile can yet be gained from the time I spent (dare I say, *wasted*?) on this classic.



And on a related note. . .

Tuned to the news and watching this medieval Catholic cathedral burn, back in April of 2019, my heart was heavy for not only the Parisians and the world, but myself, as well.

I had so anticipated a future trip to Paris and a tour of the magnificent edifice, whose damage I feared would be irreparable. No Christmas Mass was held in 2019—the first time since 1803.

Though damage was extensive, French president Emmanuel Macron set a five-year deadline to restore the cathedral and, against all odds, the first Mass in the newly-repaired structure is scheduled for December of this year. However, I've no doubt that repairs have been completed with less medieval and more contemporary influence—as history would demonstrate—and I will always be a bit sorry that I missed seeing its interior, pre-2019.



things we keep



I've been working at organizing old family photos and uploading them to my computer. Initially, I played around with AI, hoping to get rid of some blur and bring faces more into focus; however, I found that I'd rather the blurry faces than the artificial ones I could no longer recognize. Fuzzy photos, snapped at great distance, and with nothing more to identify them than a faded inscription on the back, *'I think you will know who these people are'*... well, I've decided to simply embrace it.

In this digital age, we snap just as many photos as we please, then toss the less-than-perfect ones in the recycle bin on our virtual desktop; but when it comes to these old black & whites—these links to the old days—these are the things we keep.

Hopefully this project will be completed somewhere early in the new year. I'll make a page on my website, theruralhen.com, with a link to the photos. Access will be protected, so any relative with a reasonable motive for admittance can contact me for the password.

Or, on second thought, drop by my house sometime: we'll make a pot of coffee and reminisce over the originals, still safely kept in Mom's old rose tin.

Holiday traditions take years to form, though I can't say I'm sure at what point they actually become traditions: Two years? Five? An entire decade, maybe?

As the family grows and changes, so must most everything else—including the way we do holidays in general and the holiday meals in particular. Or, at least, that's been the case with us:

When our daughter was a toddler and we became aware that she was a vegetarian, we eventually switched out the turkey dinner for waraneki (that's cottage cheese perogies, and don't dare forget the cream gravy!) She's learned to appreciate the smell of farmer sausage, since it's become synonymous with Christmas dinner. And when the kids were old enough to safely enjoy fondue, my mom would join us for that, on Christmas Eve.

Another Holiday tradition we've established is Christmas morning brunch, built around Dad's overnight buns, baked fresh in the morning and served more or less hot, depending on when everyone arrives. We are now a full dozen around the dinner table and, barring the advent of a food allergy, it would be safe to say that this holiday menu has undeniably made tradition status.

P.S. I am, however, committed to eating gluten-free—
364 days of the year!





Dad's Overnight Success

OVERNIGHT CINNAMON BUN RECIPE

Begin at 5:00 pm. Combine:

- 2¾ cups boiling water
- 1 cup sugar
- ½ cup butter
- 1 Tbsp salt

Stir until sugar is dissolved and the butter is melted. Cool to lukewarm.

Beat in:

- 2¼ tsp instant yeast
- 2 cups flour

Work in another 6 cups (approximate) of flour, until dough pulls away from the sides of the bowl.

Cover and let stand till 7:00 pm. Punch dough down and let rise again until 10:00 pm.

Shape the buns or rolls, as desired—We like the traditional rolls with butter/brown sugar/cinnamon, adding raisins and walnuts to only one pan (it will make 2 dozen large buns/rolls). place in greased baking pans Cover and let rise overnight on the counter.

In the morning, bake @ 350°F for 20-25 minutes.

To make everything extra sweet n' saucy, whisk 1 cup heavy cream with 1 cup brown sugar, and pour over the buns half-way through the baking process.



TRAVEL & ADVENTURE

A mere three days is decidedly not time enough to see, let alone do, Paris, France.

The attempt, however, was still worth the effort!

The Eiffel Tower can be seen from almost anywhere in the city!



The whole thing lights up at 8pm every evening and the lights twinkle on the hour



Paris



Always look up!

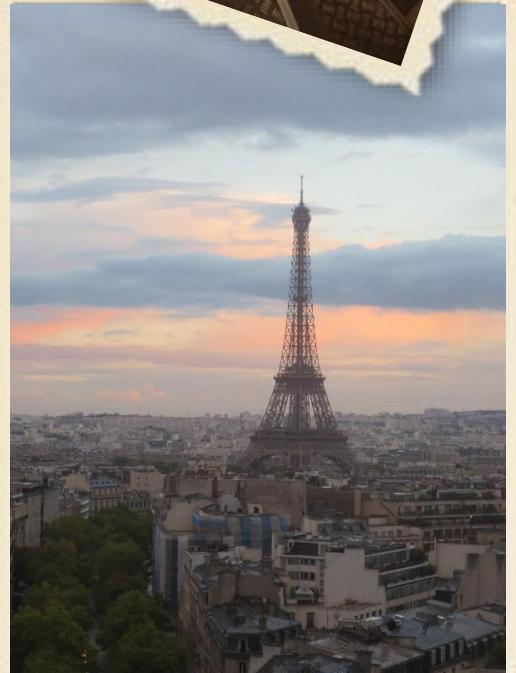
Arc de Triomphe

Triumphal arch in Paris, France



We climbed more stairs during our time in Paris than we have climbed over the course of any given year!

And watching the chaos below as rush-hour traffic makes its precarious way in the round-a-bout was definitely a highpoint.



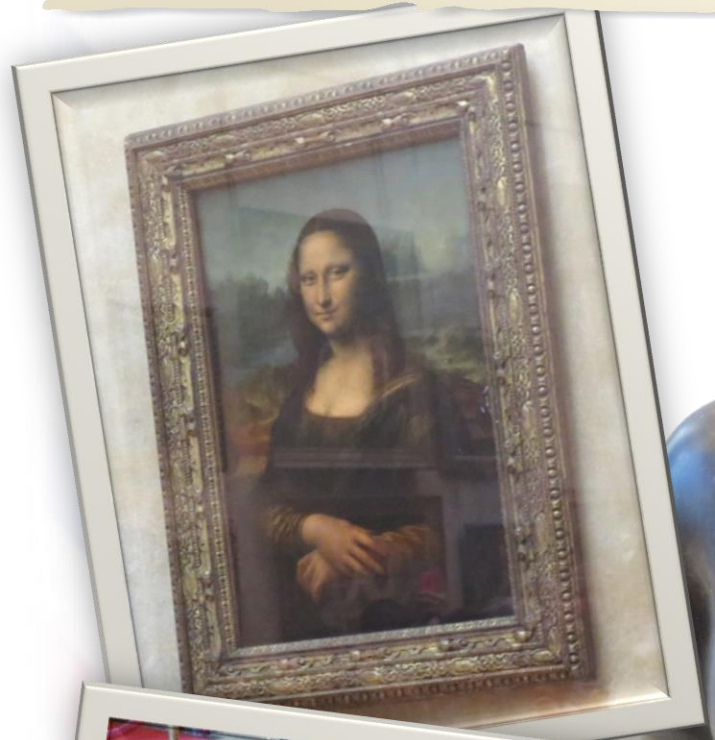
The Eiffel Tower as seen from the top of the Arc

I simply cannot over emphasize the need to keep looking up while touring the earliest architecture of this city! Indeed, I took as many photographs of ceilings as anything else!

*The Louvre
Museum in Paris, France*



When my head was not up in the Louvre's proverbial clouds, I noticed several interesting things . . .



True. Public toilets in Paris are few and far between. And also pay-per-use. But where else can one find such luxury and a kaleidoscopic choice of tissue?!

I used to read the news simply for the love of words—seeing just how smoothly I could decipher paragraphs of which I had absolutely no logical comprehension.

Strange, but true.

I've learned over the years, however, to read news (and I do read quite a lot of it) for the meaning and intent of the words, rather than for the sound of them rolling off my tongue. Not that I now understand everything I read. I don't. But at least my motive and method have, over the years, evolved into something more adult-like.

I still enjoy word games and puzzles, though—and that, for the simple pleasure of the words. Following are a couple of my favourites from 2024 . . .

MUM'S THE WORD can be played on road trips, even if I'm the one behind the wheel! I simply—or perhaps not so simply—come up with a word for each letter of the alphabet, in which that letter is silent. English is indeed a ~~frustrating~~ fascinating language 😞

(Solution, though not an exhaustive list, is on page 23)

Wordles, on the next page, requires deciphering conundrums to come up with common words and phrases. *(Solution is on page 23)*

H O L I D A Y G P A F E A S T I N G L E S N I T
 A N G E L S U O I F L A S H B M E S S I A H C C
 L O V E S G L O R I O U S A D U T N E V D A H E
 L Q U E S T E D T H C N I R G S A M X G N I R V
 E U F U G H T H A N K S G I V I N G I D R J I A
 L I S F K W I S E M E N L N I C I C L E S S S C
 U E N I V I D L A R E O A G R A M E G N I H T A
 J T P R G O E P A V Q W D S G N S N R O O S M T
 A E S R Y N C T E T I U U S I I A J N P T K A I
 H Z I P A V S A J Y O O H T N M V O S A G A S O
 H A P P Y I H A R K Y T U O B A B Y B O Y T V N
 G U N W N R S X Y O R Y Z R I L A L D E R I F G
 P N B G C D E E J O L O V Y R S E L V E S N E I
 K U I E E F S J N W L S G I T R I M M I N G S V
 H N Z R I L J H O L Y N I G H T K L T M G C N E
 G I E O E P I L E I Q G N I K A B O R N S H T E
 N T P E U F V C L W C R S T E E R G O X Y E Z N
 O Y P A L B F R O S T E D S T F I G A T H E R O
 S N O W M A N O R N A M E N T P R A Y E R R C H
 C A L K I N G H I E P E A C E O N E A R T H O P
 S L E D D I N G K A A E T R A D I T I O N L Z O
 J C R A F T S B R E A D F A M I L Y O L L M Y L
 N O E T I H W W I N T E R E D J O L L Y P K R Y
 E T A N R A C N I W O R S H I P E V R E S U B X

ADVENT
 ANGELS
 ANGELIC
 ANIMALS
 BABY BOY
 BAKING
 BREAD
 CANDLES
 CAROLS
 CELLO
 CHEER
 CHRISTMAS
 CLAN
 COZY
 CRAFTS
 DIVINE
 EGGNOG

ELVES
 ENJOY
 EVE
 FAMILY
 FEASTING
 FIR
 FIRE
 FLASH
 FLOCK
 FROSTED
 GATHER
 GIFT
 GIVE
 GLAD
 GLORIOUS
 GOD
 GOOD

GREETINGS
 GRINCH
 HALLELUJAH
 HAPPY
 HARK
 HOLIDAY
 HOLLY
 HOLY NIGHT
 ICICLE
 INCARNATE
 IVY
 JESUS
 JOLLY
 JOYOUS
 KING
 LOVES
 LOWLY

MANGER
 MESSIAH
 MUSIC
 NOEL
 NORTH
 OFFERING
 ORNAMENT
 PEACE ON EARTH
 PIE
 PRAISE
 PRAYER
 PUPPY
 QUEST
 QUIET
 READ
 RED
 REDEEMER

REJOICE
 RING
 SAVIOUR
 SERVE
 SHARING
 SHOPS
 SIGNS
 SINGING
 SKATING
 SKY
 SLEDDING
 SLEEP
 SNOW
 SNOWMAN
 SONG
 STABLE
 STAR

STORY
 THANKSGIVING
 TINSEL
 TOYS
 TRADITION
 TRIMMINGS
 TRIP
 UNITY
 VACATION
 VIRGIN BIRTH
 VISION
 VISITOR

WHITE
 WINTER
 WISEMEN
 WORSHIP
 WRAP
 XMAS
 XYLOPHONE
 YULETIDE
 ZEPPOLE*

*An Italian Donut
 @theruralhen2024

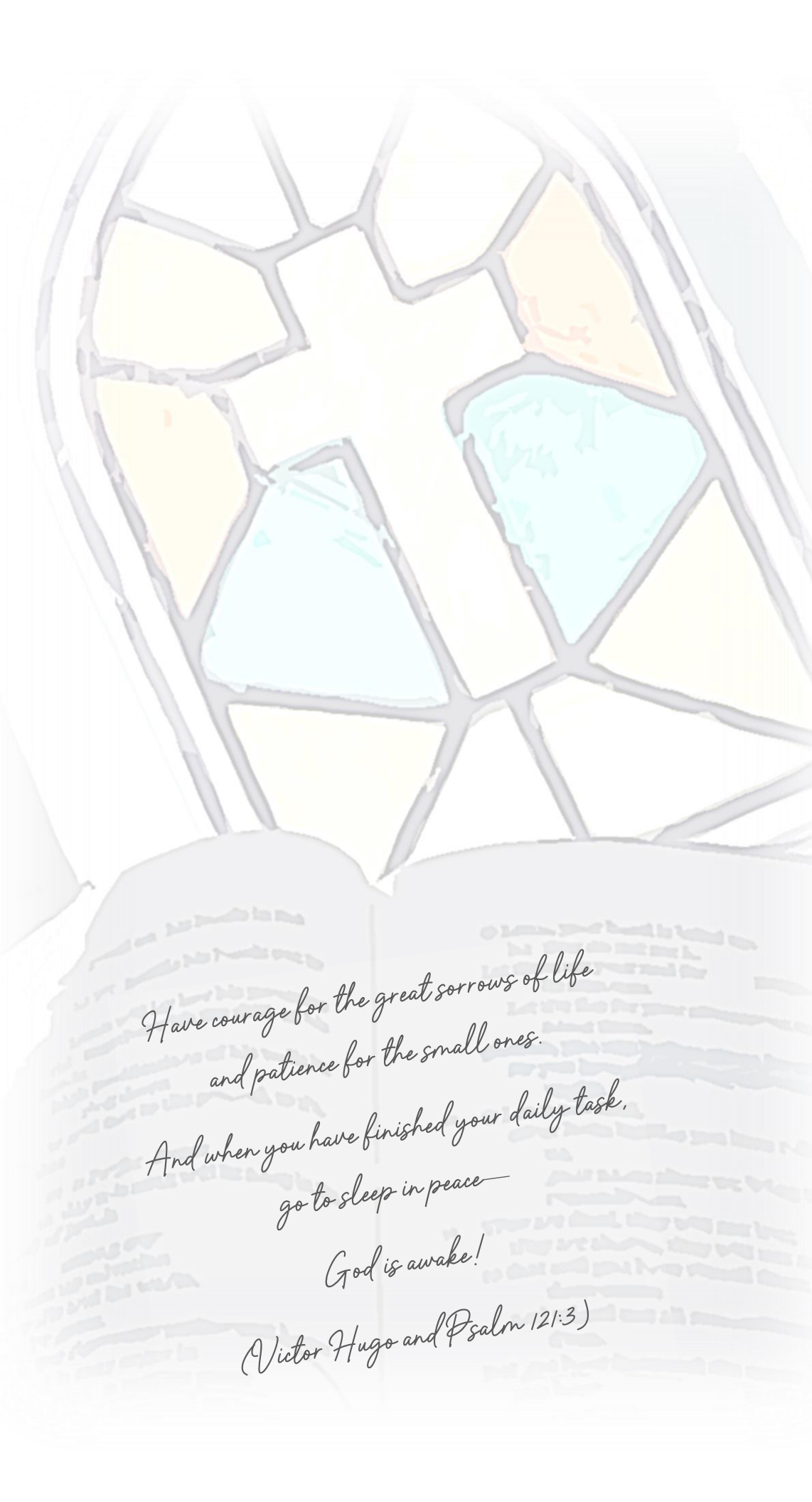
(FIND A PRINT-FRIENDLY VERSION [HERE!](#))

Solution to MUM'S THE WORD on page 20

A	bread, thread	N	hymn, autumn
B	climb, debt, subtle	O	tough, colonel, people
C	science, muscle	P	pneumonia, coup, receipt
D	Wednesday, handkerchief	Q	lacquer
E	Imagine (and a million more)	R	February
F	fifth	S	aisle, debris, island
G	sign, phlegm, gnaw	T	ballet, listen, castle
H	honest, rhyme, ghost	U	guilt, build
I	business, suit	V	e'er, ne'er (we're getting desperate)
J	marijuana	W	write, wrestle
K	knee, knit, knuckle	X	faux, faux pas
L	could, calf, walk	Y	beyond (even more desperate)
M	mnemonic	Z	rendezvous

Solution to WORDLES on page 21

1. HEAD OVER HEELS IN LOVE 2. MISSUNDERSTANDING BETWEEN FRIENDS 3. LONG WEEKEND 4. UPSET STOMACH 5. PARADISE 6. LAZY AFTERNOON 7. THREE DEGREES BELOW ZERO 8. THREE BLIND MICE 9. HAND IN HAND 10. CROSSROADS 11. JUST BETWEEN YOU AND ME 12. KEY RING 13. ANTS IN YOUR PANTS 14. SIX FEET UNDER GROUND 15. TUNA FISH 16. SHE'S BESIDE HERSELF 17. BANANA SPLIT 18. FORUM 19. TRICYCLE 20. I UNDERSTAND 21. REPEAT PERFORMANCE 22. BACKWARD GLANCE



Last spring,
I temporarily turned
my tiny greenhouse
into a sunroom.
A sort of sanctuary,
really; complete with
'stained glass' and a
wooden 'pew.'

Warm, quiet, and semi-private (it is, after all, a clear-plastic structure), it became a great little space to soak up some sun while reading my Bible and singing the old hymns dear to my heart.

With all that's going on in the world today—famines and human suffering, instability and corruption in our governments, wars and rumours of wars—how necessary it has become (or, become apparent, at least) to find these quiet places where Christ and His Word can speak the calm my anxious soul needs; a place to be reminded that my little five-acre world is very small, indeed, and that God is still in control.

*Have courage for the great sorrows of life
and patience for the small ones.*

*And when you have finished your daily task,
go to sleep in peace—*

God is awake!

(Victor Hugo and Psalm 121:3)

