

My Story

Consider  
the  
Lilies  
of the Field

By  
Jill Kemp

My story.  
Consider The Lilies Of The Field.  
This is a transcript of a recording.  
Speaker: Jill Kemp

My name is Jill Kemp and for more than 12 years I organised and facilitated a very large mainly music pre-school programme, for the community held twice a week at a church in Tauranga. I was born at the end of the Second World War and married Bob when I was 19 years old. We have four adult children and had 13 foster children, for up to 2 year periods, as well. Many of these have become part of our extended family long term. Now they all have families of their own we love being “Granny” and “Grandpop,” or “Aunty & Uncle,” to them all.

Several years ago I was asked to tell my story, one Sunday evening, in my local church. My sister’s husband really didn’t understand the difficulties we had both experienced as children and as he is hearing impaired I transcribed the recording made that evening. This is word for word as it was spoken (without the “umms!”) The few photos we had of us as children are included. I never realised, in doing this, the impact our story would have on other people’s lives.

Bob and I have a world - wide ministry equipping teachers, parents and missionaries, with free resources on our website. [www.lambsongs.co.nz](http://www.lambsongs.co.nz). It is amazing what comes out of a sack. I hope you are inspired. Read on!

Jill.



My parents married towards the end of the World War 2. My grandmother had died when my mother was about 15 years old and her death affected my mother greatly. She was a wilful child, by all accounts, the centre of attention and spoilt. Her widowed father found her difficult to control, especially in a city filled with young Service men! She met my Dad, “Bluey,” at a tram stop, looking handsome in his Air force uniform. He did a few wolf whistles, they got married and shifted down to an airbase near Blenheim. Eighteen months later I came along. Below: Jill’s christening photo at aged 6 months in the family heirloom Christening gown, made from her great aunt’s Evelyn’s wedding dress.



This poem was written by a neighbour for Dad, at my birth.

Editor Blue

Having read his poems and such,  
And enjoyed their reading very much,  
It dawned on me 'tis such a pity,  
That no one wrote of him a ditty.  
To tell a tale I now shall try,  
If you all promise not to cry.  
One fine morn I chanced to see  
Out on the lawn of his abode-  
An Airman pacing restlessly,  
-Upon his mind there was a load-  
I quickly guessed the symptoms there,  
Poor Blue was scared there'd be a pain!  
Then all at once he ceased his pacing',  
His head well forward, shoulders bent,  
That sleepless night "had him well spent!"  
He rang the doorbell of "The Lake",  
Sometime 'twas 'fore the birds would wake,  
Now we all thought that Blue seemed quiet,  
But his return, "was there a riot?"  
With head held high and lithesome walk,  
He told the story of the "Stork."  
He dashed around, he felt he 'oughta',  
'Cause he now was Daddy  
- to a brand new Daughter.  
So boys if he's "cranky" on the Range,  
Or showing signs of "in need of a change",  
It's not that he's even in need of a pill  
It's just that he wants to get home to his Jill.

A little sister arrived 22 months later. My story really concerns her as well. We talked today about our life. I wanted to make sure that I had remembered accurately. I want to tell the truth. Sometimes I feel that people's testimonies lose their impact because people are too vague and are inclined to say, "I have been through hard times and God has delivered me." But people don't really appreciate their

amazing journey. I had a dilemma because I have to speak about someone tonight and I didn't want to cast a slur on their name, but facts are facts and I just want to pray for a blessing on my Step Mum tonight.

When I was 4 years old, our neighbour invited me to Sunday school at St. Sepulchre's Anglican Church, in Khyber Pass, Auckland. I vaguely recall the building as being brown and dark; someone played the piano, people sang songs I didn't know and I put a penny in a flat brown plate, which disappeared off somewhere; I had to walk a long way and wait a long time for the lady to walk me home again. I clearly remember that the day my mother "ran away" with a friend of my Dad's was a Sunday, because I was sent next door with a note saying "Sorry that Jill can't go to Sunday school as I am leaving." That was my first introduction to "God" things and it stuck in my mind that I wasn't allowed to go to Sunday school because my mother ran away with another man. We were bundled, along with all the clothes, behind the seat of a black V8 Coupe. Our poor father came whistling home from work to find his children and wife had gone. He never really recovered from the shock.

We went to live with mum's new boyfriend. He was kind to us girls (my sister was 2 years old.) They soon had a baby. Nothing terribly dramatic happened during that time, except that I had a traumatic encounter with a wild animal when I was told to go and collect the milk from the letterbox. (Would you believe we had milk in a billy in those days!) I grizzled and cried but finally decided that wasn't working, so started down the path only to be confronted by a monster - a huge cow! I had never seen a cow before and my bloodcurdling screams sent the poor creature galloping off! I was so terrified that it gave me nightmares for years! I also got my first and only hiding from my mum for dropping a puppy!

When I was five our mother phoned and told our father to, "Come and get the girls." Poor Dad! There was no help for solo fathers in those days and he took us to his brother's place. They had one child and the family lived in a very tiny state house and the six of

us (altogether) squeezed in where we could. Our 6-foot tall father slept on a small wooden couch that gave extra seating behind the dining room table in the kitchen, my sister slept in a bed made from two armchairs pushed together in the lounge and I was fortunate enough to have my own bed in my cousin's room. It wasn't a very satisfactory arrangement, so my sister was sent to stay with various relatives. She was difficult to manage, having been neglected as a baby and wouldn't eat. She was very stubborn and would clench her teeth. People just could not get her to eat and couldn't cope with her and she was in nine homes from the time she was two until she was five years old. She was tiny and undernourished and we used to dress her in our dolls' clothes.

So, my Dad went boarding and took my little sister with him. After work each day he called in to spend a little time with me, before saying goodbye and driving off down the road. I used to get terrible pains in my tummy as I watched him go, and would hide in the wardrobe and cry and smell his overcoat, I missed him so much. My daddy was going, my mummy was gone, it was very distressing for a young child. But I had a wonderful life with my Uncle, Auntie and cousin. It was the only stable period I had in my childhood that would be a model of family life for my own future marriage and the things I was going to have to build into a family later on. I am very grateful to my dear Aunty who loved and cared for me and gave me a normal, happy, family life.

The lady that my little sister was living with was very, very kind to her. She had a totally blind daughter and took in adult boarders from the Blind Institute. These blind people took my little sister, this little neglected little thing, and they loved her. She was just the apple of their eye. She sat on their knees and they taught her nursery rhymes, songs and played with her. Those few years of my sister's life were the only stable time she had growing up. This dear lady wanted to adopt her, but Dad didn't want us girls separated. She even took us both on a holiday to visit her family in the South Island, at her own expense, and I still have wonderful memories of the experience.

Then I heard that my Daddy was getting married again and I was so excited! The lady came to visit. She smelt like lavender, but I was puzzled and hurt when she put perfume on my cousin's pillowcase, but none on mine. She shook hands with me and gripping my hand tightly, ground the bones together, hurting me and other nasty little things. I couldn't understand why. She did not want any stepchildren and suggested that Dad put us in an orphanage, but he wouldn't hear of it. They got married when I was 7½ years old. My cousin was their flower girl, but we weren't allowed to go to the wedding or even see the bride, which was a disappointment.

To understand what took place in our home it will help if I explain a little bit about Mum's temperament. She was a very highly qualified, British - trained, nursing sister with years of experience working in a regimented way of life. In those days there was a strict system of protocol and hierarchy in the nursing profession and she was used to being in complete charge in a position of authority. Prior to her coming to New Zealand she had also suffered a nervous breakdown and unfortunately had no natural gifts with children, plus she didn't want us. She loved our Dad and was jealous as we represented a part of a former relationship and my looking so like my own mother was not in my favour either! We adored our Daddy! He was so much fun and a wonderful story teller. But we were very excited to have a new Mummy. I wanted to call her Mummy right away, but we weren't allowed to. We had to call her "Aunty." I pestered them so much until in the end she relented.

We arrived at the new family situation with a box of toys each and us two girls shared a bedroom. Mum was an absolute fanatic for cleanliness and "fresh air!" When we went to bed, up went the windows and in came the mosquitoes "Zzzzzzzzm." I was terrified! I was a child who was frightened of cracks in the pavement or stairs with gaps in case I fell through. I had such an imagination that I was terrified of the mosquitoes and so I put my head under my pillow that night and when I was checked before Mum and Dad retired to bed, there I was, with my head under the pillow. So the first thing that was removed from my life was my pillow and I never slept with one again

until I left home. To this day I still have difficulty getting my pillows and neck comfortable. I will explain the downward progression as things were removed from our lives.

As with most newly weds, my parents slept in late on weekends and we were left in our bedrooms and expected to keep absolutely quiet. Mum's policy was, "Children should be seen and not heard" and should only "Speak when you're spoken to." We were not allowed to speak above a whisper, sing, whistle or fight. We weren't used to living together and so it took a bit of time to sort out our sibling rivalry and we did fight, but woe betide if you were heard! We were left for long periods of time in our bedroom to amuse ourselves. We had our box of toys each so we fiddled around with our books and the pages got torn a bit here and there, or something got broken. Mum came in and told us we were "destructive" and took the box of toys away, **forever**. Children being children we would find something to amuse ourselves. We would wake up early on Sunday morning but weren't allowed to get up until 10 o'clock, so what do you do? There's a little thread on the corner of the blanket and if you pull it, it goes ping, ping, ping ever so lovely as it unravels, then and you have a lovely piece of string to play with. You can do all sorts of things with a little bit of string! Let me tell you, that when Mum found out, I learnt very quickly how to blanket-stitch! Then we would pick bits of fluff off the blanket and make a little ball to play with. All these things were considered as "being destructive" and we got into severe trouble, even being taken to a child psychologist. Children need to be occupied. I see now, that in a way, this was part of the very beginnings of a gift God has given me today - I am extremely creative. If I can't find something I need, I will use something else at hand as a substitute. My children call it "instead of," and say their mum is an expert at it!

That first Christmas was wonderful. Mum loved a traditional English Christmas and was an excellent cook. The whole house was decorated, but it was strange not having gifts until after lunch. Mum had hand-sewn beautiful organdie dresses for us both, with matching bag and doll. But after we had opened our presents we had to leave



them all with Mum and were only allowed to look at them on rare occasions. This was the same at every birthday and Christmas. We were never allowed to play with our toys or read our books. Our beautiful new dresses we wore on long Sunday walks, always walking “properly” behind Mum and Dad (shoulders back, pick up your feet) never skipping or running; it was unnatural, but I felt so pretty in my lovely dress. Mum hand-sewn us two other dresses each and over our entire childhood these, plus new woollen coats for “best,” were the only new clothes we ever had. The shoes we arrived in we wore until they were too small and my toenails fell off. After that we went bare feet until our high-school uniform. Things were starting to get very difficult. We had to sit up straight, stand up straight, stand for hours by the wall practising “keeping your shoulders back,” walk behind mum and never speak unless you were spoken to. We were not allowed play and in fact I find it difficult to play Board Games even now! We were not allowed to walk on the polished floor in case we put a footprint on it, only on the mats (we jumped from mat to mat.) We were not allowed to sing or even talk to each other.

My sister had hives, which she scratched getting blood on the sheets and as a result the sheets were taken away. Because of this I had to make “mitts” for my sister. For years I could never even think about these mitts because I found it so traumatic. I was 7 years old and I had to go under the house and find a sack. I was terrified of under the house, with all the spiders and dark and I can remember that the sack smelt of cat pee. I brought it out and I had to cut along the threads in a straight line. I had never had any experience of sewing, but had to back stitch, counting the threads two stitches ahead, one stitch back and it was as strong as a sewing machine seam. If it was crooked I was belted around the head and had to unpick it. It was really hard and I had to make these two mitts for my little sister, then she had to wear them, tied around her wrist with rope. It was really traumatic for me that she had to wear these things. When I phoned her today I asked her, “Do you remember your mitts?” She said, “I will never forget the smell - I can still smell them to this day.” She wore them to bed, at home, at school, she wore them everywhere. Neighbours were very kind to us. We would go to school and take

them off and hide them and people used to help us put them on again so Mum wouldn't find out and give us a hiding! (Hidings mainly occurred when Dad was absent.)

One time, when the £5 rent money was due, my sister and I (a five year old and a seven year old) were given a sealed envelope to take around the corner and up a street to the landlord's house to pay the rent. My Dad probably earned less than £5 in a week, so I suppose the equivalent value today would be a week's wages. We had no idea what money was. We didn't know that you could steal it or spend it. However, the landlord told mum that the envelope was empty and to this day we have no idea what happened to it. We searched the street but it was never found. I have asked my sister, "Did you ever take that money?" But she didn't and neither did I. But, oh boy, did we get into trouble!

We got thrashed! We got accused! Now, I can understand that Mum would be very upset, but it was because of this incident that I had to get a thick black army blanket, fold it in half and sew up and along, using the same strong, back stitching accompanied with the same thrashings and tears. The top was turned over with rope threaded through. This blanket-sack, that I had to make, became a big part of my life. I had to put my little sister in there and she was tied in around the neck, with only her head sticking out. This was a punishment to show the world what "thieves and liars and dirty, filthy, kids" we were. To embarrass us in the neighbour-hood, I had to take my sister and lead her on a rope, shuffling around the streets in this sack. She had to put her little feet in the corners so she wouldn't fall over and be paraded around the road. It was so humiliating. Just to be able to cope with the situation I said, "Let's be bears. We'll be bears going for a walk." When we met people and they asked what we were doing (it being obvious we were quite upset) I would say, "We're bears and we are going for a walk." We used these skills to assist us. But for 10 years we had the cruellest things happen to us. I actually had to sleep in that sack from the time I was 7 or 8 until I was sixteen years old because I put my head under the blankets to hide from the mosquitoes and the blankets were taken away. I remember the first night when I

cried and cried at being tied in the sack. But by the time I left home and had a normal bed I missed it around my shoulders! The worst thing about it was that I couldn't get out to go to the toilet and with all the anxiety I started wetting the bed again. I was such a nervous child that if anyone walked past me I would cringe, thinking I was going to be hit, because we had so many thrashings and hits around the head. The neighbours in the adjoining flat were constantly banging on the wall when Mum was hitting us. It must have been terrible for them to hear these little girls receiving such treatment.

My sister was still being very difficult with her eating and one time I remember feeling so upset when Mum held her down and force-fed her. She was choking and crying and Mum wiped the mucus from her nose on a crust of bread and forced it down her throat. It was hard for me to bear watching this happen, let alone the desperation my sister experienced. Because she was "such a baby" she had to wear nappies to school and a baby's dummy was pinned on her jumper. When the kids teased her we told them it was a "light-bulb" brooch. During P.E. the nappies fell down and I got called from class by my sister's teacher and asked to explain why my sister was wearing them. She was very kind and concerned. Because of this incident, the condition of our clothing (my tartan skirt ended up being more darns than tartan) and the bruises on us, the school called in the Social Welfare. I was frightened when they questioned me about being hit, in case they told Mum and I got into trouble. I trusted no one.

All our childhood we had to work and work, sewing or cleaning, polishing and re-polishing the floors. Mum would skid over it and we had to do it again - so demoralizing. I sat cross legged, for hours and hours, on a coarse rope mat, in the hall, sewing and mending "back up straight," until my legs went to sleep and I couldn't walk when I got up. My tartan skirt, which I loved, got a hole in it and I was accused of "making holes in my skirt on purpose." I was taught how to darn by putting the sewing thread from one side of the hole to the other, making another parallel thread next to it while keeping the tension even on the fabric and not pulling it too tight. Across these threads, the thin cotton was woven under and over evenly until the hole was

darned. I was only 7 and cried with fear and frustration because of the constant harassment and abuse during the exercise. When I had finished I was so proud. I had to stand at attention and ask, "Please would you inspect my sewing." Of course it was never to her satisfaction. She would give it a tug and make the hole worse. After a cuff around the ears I was made to start all over again. This was to keep me busy, out of mischief and teach me a lesson for "deliberately" making a hole in my skirt! A complaint was made by neighbours to Social Welfare about our abuse and that we were never allowed outside to play. As a result Mum ordered us outside every day after breakfast, until lunch time; then again until 4:30. We were not allowed inside (even for toilet) and woe betide if we were late! Off we went to play in the park or roam the streets for hours (my sister in her "mitts" of course.) We were always asking passers-by what the time was.

But in that difficult time, God saw our need and sent us a neighbour - someone to help us; a dear Christian lady who saw the pitiful state of these little children. Her heart was moved with compassion. I remember her saying, "If I had two little girls like you, I'd count myself so blessed." We spent many hours playing in Mrs Simms' garden (unbeknown to Mum!) She gave us simple things like golden syrup on bread and was so kind. She befriended Mum when she was walking past her gate and invited us to Sunday school. Mum was a very religious lady, she used to preach at us all the time about our sins; our lies and stealing and about God's judgement, so she was quite happy for us to go. She thought it might "reform" us or change our behaviour. So, along we went to Grey Friars Sunday school in Mt Eden, for a year or so. (Note: there is a difference with "*knowing*" about God and *following him*.) While I am talking about my neighbour - are you some child's neighbour? What about taking them to Sunday School where they can hear that God loves them? (It is so important to teach your little children about God when they are young, giving them the gift of faith and hope in preparation for the problems and difficulties life brings.) Maybe you know some scruffy little kid, who is a pain and hangs around?

The Sunday School held a Scripture Union, Bible Memory Verse Competition, with a prize being either a Bible or a Hymn Book. I learnt Luke Chapter 2 Verses 1-12 ( I can remember it to this day.) I won a prize and could choose between a Bible or Hymn Book. I didn't know what a Bible was and because I loved singing I chose a Hymn Book. When all the children had received their prizes there was one Bible left over. **The person who was distributing them looked around and randomly held it out to me saying, "You take this, it's spare." In God's love and mercy, before I even knew to cry out to Him, He sent me the answer and isn't that just like God!** I want to show you something - my precious Bible. If there was a fire in our house, my husband knows that you don't save the silver or the antiques, you save Jill's special Bible! This is the most precious thing that I own. This is what saved my life - this little Bible that I hid, in a hole in my mattress for many years. I went so proudly home with my prizes and of course they were taken from me and put away "until I could learn to behave."



When I was nine years old Mum and Dad decided that they would buy their own house and shift away from the "nosey neighbours." They bought a house in west Auckland which was out in the country, in those days. The house was two - storied, on a hillside. The back door on the top floor opened at ground level. The toilet was next to the back door. All the living areas were upstairs with the three bedrooms downstairs. There was a steep staircase of 14 steps between

levels. To help with the mortgage Mum started back nursing, doing night-duty five nights a week. That is when things got really bad, because she became sleep deprived for years and years. She went to bed at 7 pm each night and got up in time to go on an 11 pm night duty. So, from the time I was nine until I was seventeen years old, I too went to bed, in my sack, at 7 o'clock and was awake with the birds. Us girls had separate rooms and the only way that we could communicate with each other was by lying on the floor and looking under the crack under the door, diagonally to the other bedroom. If a train was coming or we heard that Mum was busy, we would tap on the floor to each other and whisper. We were only allowed to the toilet every four hours, but if we signalled to each other we could, by opening our doors simultaneously, slip across the hall (being careful that our shadows merged on the hall floor, so Mum wouldn't notice) to get together. We weren't able to achieve this very often. For the most part, unless we were working around the house, we were "locked" in our bedrooms, curtains drawn in semi darkness, with nothing at all in our rooms but a wire wove bed-base, a mattress, a blanket and blanket "sack" each. We spent hours standing with our hands on our head and often Mum would sit at the top of the stairs, preaching and lecturing at us for literally hours at a time, until my neck got a crick in it! When I became a teenager I rebelled one day; eyed up the distance to the front door and estimated I had enough time to say a few choice home truths in reply and make a speedy exit before she came down those 14 steps in three strides! I seem to remember staying safely up the hill until Dad came home. No dinner that night!

When it came time to go to bed, we stripped naked and washed in  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a bucket of cold water, on the laundry floor using a small piece of sunlight soap. The procedure was that you washed one ear and (summer or winter) you would stand to attention, naked, outside the kitchen door and ask Mum, "Please would you inspect my ear." When she was ready, often as not annoyed with the interruption, she would grab the ear, belt me around the head and send me back to do it again. On and on went the whole traumatic procedure each day until we left home. We were never allowed to use the proper bathroom, bath or shower. I only remember ever having about four baths in 8

years! At bedtime it was time to get into our sacks and I would have to ask Mum to do it up. She would bash me round the head, tie it tight, often nearly choking me and give me a shove. Many times I fell down the stairs. How I managed to negotiate them with my toes in the corners so I could walk and being unable to hold on to the banister with my arms inside the sack, is a miracle in itself! My sister had her mitts tied on first, then both mitts were tied together in front of her, then tied into her blanket sack. If Mum was busy, she would get me to tie the mitts up and I was able to make them loose enough for her to slip her hands out.

Apart from when we were at school (a requirement by law) we were in solitary confinement in our bedrooms for 8 years. When we were talking about it today my sister said that for her that was really the hardest thing to bear - not being allowed even to talk. When I say "locked" there wasn't actually a lock on the door, but fear kept us there. We simply had to sit in the middle of the floor cross-legged. We were not even supposed to look out the window, but of course we did! We could huff on it and draw pictures, watch a bird or the world go by. It was like being in a prison. With bare floorboards and no floor mat it was cold in the winter and the days seemed long and endless, especially if it was a wet, miserable day. We were not permitted to sit down on our bed and Mum would creep down the stairs and try to catch us out. If I saw her shadow pass my door I would signal with a cough giving my sister time to stand up. She wore her mitts all day unless she was working or sewing. I asked my sister when I was speaking to her, "What did you do all day to amuse yourself?" She told me she "imagined" all day and she had a pet fly! Me too! I taught myself how to knit on two tiny pins with a piece of sewing cotton - something small enough to hide in the hole in my mattress! Only being allowed to go to the toilet every four hours became a major problem. I would be "busting" and would walk around my bedroom crying, "God help me, God help me," trying not to wet myself. If I did, my nose was rubbed in it, my wet pants rubbed in my mouth and down my throat, leaving my mouth bruised and swollen. It was awful really, and of course I wet my bed - being in my sack I couldn't get out of it and my mattress perished. But a mattress with a hole in it is a

very wonderful place to hide things! Mum would creep down the stairs, throw open the door and before I had time to hide anything, search my room. She could find a pencil lead hidden under a crack in the skirting board, but I remember the day I had left my Bible on the windowsill and although she searched my room she never saw the Bible and I thank God for His loving protection!

Before my Dad had remarried, my own mother had visited and had taken me to the Easter show. She bought me a large woolly dog. When I was about 12, my Stepmother decided that I had “purposely” made it smelly and made me burn it. That was one of the most traumatic days of my life. I just couldn’t light the match because to me it felt like I was destroying the only tangible link I had to my mother. I cried and pleaded to no avail. The incident was traumatic for my sister too. The helplessness and emotion of watching each other being abused affected us deeply. We both suffered from terrible nightmares.



The hopelessness! It didn't matter what you did, it was wrong. If you were sent to the shop for butter and they never had any you would get a hiding for not using your initiative and bringing dripping. But if you bought dripping it would be wrong. I never developed initiative until I left home and it took years for me to be able to make even simple choices like which colour article to buy, I wasn't used to it.

When Mum and Dad first got married we ate at the table with them and quickly learned the best of English table manners! But as the years went by mealtimes became unpleasant as we were constantly picked on and our parents argued, so we were made to eat



on the floor, sitting cross-legged on the downstairs mat in the hall. Our meals were left out for us to collect on the floor at the top of the stairs and it was a bit of an art to get our dinner, with our only clock being the sounds of our surroundings. One had to listen out very carefully for the crockery to started rattling or risk missing a meal. We always had dessert though (unless we lost it as punishment!) Even when I was very ill with mumps my meal was placed outside my door but Mum never came in to see me, as she was afraid of catching mumps herself. One of the biggest hurdles I faced when I left home was sitting at a table for a meal and being able to get the food from the plate to my mouth on a fork.

I learned consequences too! Once I left my black, fabric, school raincoat on the line overnight and after a severe frost it hung there like a frozen piece of cardboard. I was made to take it down, frozen as it was, and wear it to school. No amount of tears made any difference and in the end I realized that I would be standing there all day, so I forced my arms into the sleeves. I arrived at school blue with cold and the teacher had to defrost me by the fire! We walked miles to school with bare feet, along the rough ballast stones of the railway line and through the Waikumete Cemetery.



Those 10 years of our lives seemed endless. It all felt so utterly hopeless. I've got something here to show you, it is an embroidered table-mat which my Grandma gave to me. She said, "I want you to have this, it took me 10 years to make and nobody but you could understand what 10 years feels like." (Of course my sister did too.) I want you to imagine 10 years. Where were you 10 years ago? Take a minute to recall all the things that have happened in your life in the last 10 years. It seems a long time ago, doesn't it? My sister and I were eight years in solitary confinement in an EMPTY room. We never played, we never had friends over and one of us was always played against the other. I

really did want to be good. I wasn't a rebellious child, but only one of us at a time was ever in Mum's "good books" as we called it. If you were in the "good books," as a special treat you might be allowed to read a children's Sunny Stories paperback. (Someone had given them to Mum for us girls but we were only allowed to look at them very rarely.) My sister told me that she used to memorize the words, even the "Printed in Great Britain," so that when she was in isolation she could bring them to mind. We used to get each other into trouble to get into the "good books." My sister had to feel my mattress each morning to check if I had wet it and I would beg her not to "tell" so I wouldn't get in the "bad books." It wasn't until recent years that we realized even as adults we were being played against each other and now we have become very close. Sad, isn't it? So here we were all those years.

As is usual in cases of child abuse, the children become isolated from their extended family. Mum never encouraged Grandma or Aunty to visit us because she "didn't want any interference" bringing us up. I only remember them visiting us once and after we had come upstairs, stood to attention and parroted in a robotic way, "Hullo," but we had to stay in our rooms during the visit. Everyone else had cake and afternoon tea. Grandma tried to give us some pocket money as she left, but Mum threw it down the path after her and refused to let us have it. Grandma was so upset she never visited again. On the few occasions we were at a family gathering at her place, us two girls had to stay outside. Our cousins sneaked cake out to us. It must have been very distressing for Grandma. I have since learned that she used to ask to be taken on Sunday drives past our house, "In case I see the girls." When I was about 12 years old the family drove down to Wanganui to visit our ninety-eight year old Great grandma before she died. It was a miserable trip in the back of the Bradford van and I was carsick as usual. It frightened me to see someone so old. She lay in bed with snow white hair, frail and thin; a tiny lady of 4ft 10in; blind, deaf, bedridden and dying. She took me by the hand and spoke words into my life, which went straight into my heart and helped me through some of the worst times. Great Grandma said, "**When you think no one loves you, remember God does.**" I have never forgotten those

few words, they gave me such comfort and hope. What an important role Grandparents play in a child's life. Do you speak into the lives of your family?

When Mum started night duty, our Dad had a job as a salesman, which involved his being away for one week of every month. We would be left home alone for all those hours. It was terrifying if there was a thunder-storm (I was always scared of the dark) but it was also freedom! We had gone to bed at 7 o'clock and there was no having your light on to read or anything. (It is a wonder that I never strained my eyesight reading library books until the light failed. Sneaking them home from school, I hid them in a bush until I could climb out my bedroom window to retrieve them and hide them in my mattress, or sneak them downstairs in my knickers!) So, when Mum had gone to work we got up at 11 o'clock! We crept around the house, not putting on too many lights because some well-meaning neighbour was bound to ask Mum, "Is everything alright? I saw your lounge light on in the middle of the night," then would we be in trouble! We were really hungry. For breakfast we had stale bread and milk. It started as a punishment but when I left home I missed it. Every single day we had 4 very thin (usually not the most fresh) slices of bread with the butter, Vegemite or peanut butter scrapped on thinly. Mum was VERY thrifty. When Dad was away we would have tripe for 2 nights and thick vegetable soup for three nights or something similar. When Dad was home we had pudding. But we were fed and we rarely got sick. (We had sties and sores but I never ever remember having so much as a sticking plaster or a doctor's visit during our entire childhood - you got nothing and learned to expect nothing.)

I often felt light headed at school and think it was because I was hungry. So, when Mum was at work, oh boy, did we have a great time! Everything was under lock and key because us children were thieves, but I knew where the key was and learnt how to be careful not to put a finger mark on a door where she would see it. The pantry secured by a hasp and staple with a padlock on the door. It was full of tinned and bottled food. I discovered how to take the screws out of the latch, get a tin of condensed milk, make a hole in it and we had a

picnic, it was wonderful! We had a gorse - filled paddock next door and would throw the empty tins over! I being the most dreadful aim, and oh dear there would be a tin stuck on the top of the bush for Mum to see! So we would throw rocks and sticks. Mum must have sometimes thought to herself, "I am sure I had a tin of this or that." We used to steal out of the cupboard all the time; she had the most amazing pantry! It was incredible that she never ever found out what we were doing!

We would steal food out of the dog bowl! Mum, Dad (and the dogs) had bacon and eggs and I could smell it, yum! So if I timed it right, when the dog bowls rattled on the bench, I could go to the toilet which was behind back door (the two dogs were tied to the door handle) then, when Mum put down their food, I would quickly go back to my room, pinching bacon on the way. I had to be quick to - you know how dogs wolf down their dinner! (By the way our dog bowls were spotless - the dogs were more likely to catch worms from me than me from them!)

Many nights I went to bed with no dinner and I cried. I used to cry and cry and cry and cry. I wanted my real mummy, I wanted love, I didn't want to be hit. It was a desolate life for a child. But I learnt that it doesn't matter how much you cry, if you've gone to bed hungry to learn a lesson, you wake up in the morning and you're still alive and life goes on. Mum and Dad had some terrible fights. Plates would be thrown, yelling and screaming. Mum would sometimes pack her suitcase to leave and I would hold my breath in hope, but always at the last minute, there would be reconciliation. I felt so responsible when they had fights, because it was usually about us children. I was very protective of my Dad and once I thought Mum had hit him so I rushed up stairs, grabbed a broom and whacked her on the arm! The neighbours were all told about my attack, with a huge egg on Mum to prove what a nasty, violent child I was! Today I cannot bear to watch T.V. programmes where people shout at each other.

We worked. We had to get up in the morning and wash all the walls, all the ceilings and all the floors (lifting the mats) of the entire

house every day (except for Mum's bedroom and the lounge which were out of bounds.) We worked and worked. You didn't just work, though - nothing you ever did was right. Then we would be flogged with the wooden spoon until it broke, then with the copper stick which is like a wooden broom handle, the kettle cord or dog leash. Mum was extremely strong and she would grab me by the wrist and thrash me until she was spent. I told Dad that Mum hit me over 100 times in one go, but of course he couldn't take my word over Mum's. So I decided I would count out loud! Mum would be thrashing me and I would go, "One, two, etc." which infuriated her more but at least it made her realize how many times I was being hit and it eased off a little. I would have got 100 hits almost every day, during that period. My head would be bashed against the wall until I was almost senseless and thumped on the back.

The last thrashing was when I was almost seventeen years old. I was naked when mum grasped me by the wrist, flogged me over and over again, with the dog leash, pushing me down onto the wire-wove base of the bed to stop me running around in circles to escape. Suddenly I could take no more and kicked out with my two feet, catching Mum in the chest and winding her. I thought I had killed her! She couldn't get her breath, her eyes were rolling and I was in such a panic because I thought I would go to prison. I remember pouring a glass of water on her head! But I was never hit again!

Disappointments - you learned never to get your hopes up because you would end up being disappointed. If there was something on at school and I would ask to go but if I was given permission usually the privilege would be taken away before the event, so I learned not to hope. If you can imagine a child in depression, well that was what I became like. I was painfully shy, lacked in any self-confidence, suffered terrible nightmares and panic attacks and my spirit was broken, I couldn't look in a mirror. I hated my step-mother! I prayed to God that she would die in a terrible car crash on her way to work! I did! I just hated her. And I made up my mind that when I left home I would NEVER EVER speak to her again.

At school I was never picked for teams because I had not ever learned to play, lacking co-ordination and ball skills, making me a liability to the team and the fact that I smelt of stale urine made me even less socially acceptable! But school was a release to me and I loved learning. I was in the top level of my age group, but if there was a cooking class for example and we worked with a partner, no one wanted to work with me because I was never allowed to bring an egg or whatever we were supposed to bring from home. For sewing class, I was never allowed to take any material. But once again God sent along one of His dear children to help me. The original owners of Palmer's Nurseries in Auckland were Christians and their sister, Mrs. Jackson, sent her daughter, Marion, to school, with 3 yards of brand new, green and white gingham material, for my sewing, after she told her mother how sorry she felt for me. Mrs Jackson had never even met me! I have never forgotten her kindness.

I was constantly in trouble at school for not having completed my homework, the teachers never knowing that I was not allowed to do it at home, so I tried to fit it in during school hours. Just before I was to sit my School Certificate Secondary School Examination, the teachers realized the difficulties I was having and contacted my parents. It was one of the greatest disappointments of my life was that although I was bright at school, I failed to pass the examination because of a terrible thrashing I had on the morning of my Geography paper. It caused me to arrive at the exam half an hour late and in my stressed state forgot to take any coloured pencils from my bag. I was too shy to ask the Examiner for them so my paper was handed in without any of the maps being coloured and I failed to pass the paper by only a few critical marks. This disappointment added to my already low self esteem.

There were many other precious people too and my best friend at school was also a Christian! The loving kindness of Christian people to my sister and me as we were growing up, was incredible. What about you? What about your neighbour? What about that little kid? How can you help? Can you be Jesus' hands? I saw kindness in Christians and I thought, "When I grow up I want to be like them, I

want to be a Christian.”

I fell in head over heels in love with Bob, at school, when I was nine years old (although he never knew.) I carved his name on my windowsill and I prayed for him for nine years, never, ever really expecting that he would be the least bit interested in anyone like me. I thank God today for answering my prayers and giving me such a wonderful, stable, Christian husband, who loves me and is my best friend. (He does find it impossible to understand the trauma we suffered as he had such a stable childhood himself and he has more difficulty with forgiving Mum than I do!)

When we moved to Henderson God gave us something so amazing - he gave us Christian neighbours and they prayed for us! They heard yelling and us kids crying out. I used to cry out, “Have mercy! Have mercy!” Can you imagine your neighbour's kids crying out for mercy? It would be so upsetting. Mr. Dixon invited us to Sunday school. He took many of the local children in the back of his little truck and I can remember him playing his piano accordion, his face shining as he sang, “He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today, He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way.” I heard about Joseph and the pit. He cried in the pit! He didn't get saved out of the pit, but God was with him in the pit. One Sunday morning Mum and Dad went early to the vegetable shop and we were left to wait for a ride to Sunday School. Things had been really difficult at the time and we took the opportunity to pack some things in a blanket and run away. (Of course we came home when it got dark because we were scared - hiding or no hiding!) Dad was frantic and fearing we had drowned in the creek nearby, searching there, fell in. I worked for years to pay off the cost of new slippers and underwear, but the worst punishment of all was that we were not allowed to go to Sunday school again.

When I was about 12 years old, our neighbours invited me to “Oil town U.S.A.” the very first Billy Graham film showing at the local picture theatre and I was allowed to go! My heart was touched as I heard the Gospel message. I was given a card, which explained

how you could give your life to Jesus and I filled it in. At the first opportunity I searched the house for my little Bible, which I hid in the hole in my mattress. If you examine it closely you will see that the pages are worn thin. I have read it from cover to cover many, many times. I believe that the Word of God kept my sanity. I read how God spoke to Moses and I wondered if God spoke to people these days? If there really was a God then I wanted to know and my search for God started. There is a verse in the Bible in Jeremiah 29:13 which says: **And you shall seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart.**



Tonight, before I came up here to speak, feeling nervous, I went into the ladies' rest room and there on the bench were these flowers! God knew I had on my heart to read this to you and there was this arrangement of lilies! When I was a little girl I read something in my Bible that touched my heart right at a time when I was feeling so desolate, ugly, worthless, forsaken and alone and my clothes, hair and appearance embarrassed me. These words in the Bible seemed to jump right out of the page and speak into my life bringing tears to my eyes: Luke 12: 27-28 **“Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will He clothe you, O you of little faith! If He cares so much for the lilies of the field then how much more does He care about you?”** It was the first time that a Bible verse “spoke” to me as a child. Whenever I read it I cried because I felt the love of God and realized that I was so very precious to Him and that God knew of my needs and would look after me. I can truly say He has done so throughout my whole life.





Tune: Mary had a little lamb.”

Jesus has a Precious Lamb,  
Precious Lamb, Precious Lamb,  
Jesus has a Precious Lamb  
This Precious Lamb is YOU!

There is much more that I could say, but in closing I just want to tell you the most amazing thing of all is forgiveness. I have brought my Precious Lamb puppet tonight to help me show you what I mean.. One day as I was singing to the children a thought dropped straight into my heart - my stepmother is Jesus' precious lamb? She is so precious to Him! I was shocked! Didn't God know how mean and cruel Mum was? **But God loves the person - not the deed. We each have to take responsibility for the choices we make and our actions.** Then I understood and made a choice that day to forgive mum. It was hard. It didn't happen over night – it took time and I had to forgive her over and over as she continued to hurt me.

I was still terrified to visit Mum because nothing I did was right and she was always critical of me. I felt so uncomfortable that I avoided visiting or even phoning her. But God gave me courage when I was afraid to go and see her. I'll read it to you from Isaiah Chapter

50 verse 6. It talks about when Jesus was afraid to face hurt. **“I offered my back to those who beat me and my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard. I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting, because the sovereign Lord helps me I will not be disgraced. He who vindicates me is near.”** God impressed on my heart, “Go and visit your mother, show her love, show her kindness,” and I went in obedience. It wasn't easy but it was made easier because I knew to whom she belonged and I tried to look at her through God's loving eyes.

Jealousy is a terrible thing. There is a verse in the Bible in Proverbs 27:4 which says: **Wrath is cruel and anger is outrageous but who is able to stand before envy (jealousy).** People ask me why Mum did this to us. She had good upbringing and happy childhood in her own family. I can only think it was because she was sleep deprived and jealous of our love for our dad; that she had once suffered a nervous breakdown and because of her ‘old school’ English, nursing background as well as her temperament. Although there is NO excuse to abuse children, but it did help me to understand.

One thing I know for sure is that the suffering I went through has given me a heart of compassion for people with needs and it has put **“iron in my soul.”** One of the hardest things to overcome is fear; I had terrible panic attacks, nameless terror. Heart palpitations and fear even at the thought of having to pick up the telephone and talk to Mum. It takes courage to face your fears. But God has given me courage. He has given me joy and peace. Sometimes when I ask people if they would come and help me at mainly music they will often say to me, “Jill, it's all right for you to be an up-front leader, you're so confident but I could never do that.” Or they will say, “Jill, you're amazing.” But I know that I am a miracle - it is God who is amazing! If they only knew how much I had been crushed. I was so shy I couldn't walk on the same side of the street as someone in case they looked at me; if I saw someone coming I'd cross over to avoid having eye contact. I couldn't look in a mirror for years and if I went to speak and people turned to look at me I would get in a panic and my words would all come out wrong or I would say something



entirely inappropriate and get embarrassed. It was agony. But God took my life and, like an onion He slowly peeled off the layers of hurt. I often think that when I was a child if I could have looked into the future and seen myself now, I'd have thought that I had died and gone to Heaven! I have sheets on my bed! My little granddaughter flopped backwards on my bed one day and she said, "Granny, you've got a "Princess's bed!" And I have! It is all cream lace and I've got this lovely headboard with a white and brass wrought iron bed head! I have got a princess's bed and it's a waterbed! I thought how blessed I am! I'm loved, I've got a family, little grandchildren and I am a miracle. I should not be standing here tonight but for the grace of God. My sister said to me today, "If it hadn't been for God we wouldn't have survived or we would have ended up with real mental problems." God was sufficient for me and He will be sufficient for you too.

One of the keys to my wholeness was forgiveness and another was dealing with self-pity. I used to have "pity parties" like you wouldn't believe! It was so sad because of what I had been through, I felt so sorry for myself. But one thing I learnt is that no one likes to go to someone else's pity party! Many years ago I suffered a nervous breakdown and I faced all the things in my life that I have talked about here today. I could never think about them without feeling the hurt and getting upset, so if ever a thought came into my mind it was as though I would quickly retrieve it and stuff it back in. I felt like a bottle full of fizzy ready to explode with all this pressure inside. When I had the breakdown God made me face all these hurts and I went back through my life, just me and God together, and one at a time I thought about each hurt, asked God to heal it and because Jesus had given His life for that very sinful act, to forgive Mum for that thing (like the mitts for example.) I could never think about it before, let alone talk about it. For me to be able to stand up here today and

express these things without feeling upset shows how complete the healing is. When I faced each thing individually in this way the pressure I felt inside was gone instantaneously! It was truly amazing.

Jesus also said:

**Don't repay evil with evil, but overcome evil with good.** 1 Peter 3:9:

**Love your enemy, do good to those who spitefully use you.** Matthew 5:44

**Bless them that persecute you.** Romans 12:14

These are attitude-changing principles and they work! I asked God to bless Mum every time I think of her. At first it nearly choked me to say it, but now I mean it!

After her experiences in a Concentration Camp, during World War 2, Corrie ten Boom loved to say, “ **There is no pit so deep that He is not deeper still.**” My sister and I have personally experienced it ourselves.

A few years before she died, Mum came to stay with us! She phoned me and invited herself for three days! She had never stayed in my home in 35 years! I felt very nervous about it but knowing how precious she is to God helped me and I just cared for her and loved her! She suddenly saw that I was a human being and I had turned out reasonably O.K! It did a healing in Mum (and me too) and I just thank the Lord. I tried to broach the subject of our childhood by gently mentioning that we went through some hard times when we were children but all she said was, “you were such a manipulative child.” Some things you have to leave in God's hands.

Maybe there is someone in your life you need to forgive. Tell God about it, asking him to heal each hurtful memory as you bring each thing specifically to your mind and ask him to forgive the other person, remembering as you do how precious they are to God. He loves the person, not the deed. So, I can truly say that God was with me in the pit; that He takes our difficulties and will turn them to good in your life, if you'll let Him. He wastes nothing. I believe that self-

pity is one of the most common factors in preventing emotional healing in people's lives. Just thank God for the difficulties and trust Him. I am so thankful for the times I went through. I am thankful for all of those hard times because they have made me the woman I am today. And most of all I am so thankful that Jesus died for me. I challenge you today to be a neighbour in your neighbourhood and in the community. Spread the love of God around because that is what saved me.

After reading this book, people often ask the following questions, not clearly addressed:

\* Why did our father allow such abuse?

When he tried to come to our defence he was overpowered by a stronger temperament and mum verbally abused him too. Our Dad loved us dearly. Because his own father had abandoned his family when dad was a baby he had a strong desire to keep his own family together and provide a home for us girls. I remember him frequently stating with frustration, "This is like living in a Belsen horror camp." Much of the worst abuse happened when he was absent.

\*Did mum ever apologise to us?

No. But that isn't the point! My forgiveness of her isn't conditional on her apologising.

\*What happened to your sister?

She went south, changed her name to Marje, blocked out her past and is happily married to a lovely Christian man. They have three children, a foster son and many grandchildren. Marje is a wonderful Christian woman with a practical faith in God and has been leader of a mainly music group in Invercargill. This book brought her face to face with her past and there were issues of healing and forgiveness to work through, but it also has also produced healing in her life. Marje (as she is now called) is a woman of compassion, wisdom & love and makes a difference in her community.

\*Is this story really true?

Absolutely! There are many people who can validate our testimony. In fact, the half has not been told. It is a different thing entirely to read it than experience it, but if I had the choice of an easier road instead of the one I have walked, I would choose this way again. God can turn difficulties to good in your life – if you let Him. It has added a dimension somehow; I call it “iron in my soul,” and it gives me a living faith in my heavenly Father. It is not God’s will for any child to suffer, but he certainly has His Angels around!

It was a very special moment when my dear dad died in my arms. While mum went to get fresh linen, I was holding him on a chair when he slumped in my arms. I couldn’t call her because I didn’t want to alarm him as he was frightened about facing the process of dying. As I lay him gently on the bed saying, “I love you, I love you,” his last words back to me were “I love you.” God gives us blessings in a way we can never imagine. After he died, my relationship with Mum improved gradually, especially during her last years, when she was in a rest home. We became very close and I can truly say she loved me too. God’s grace helped me complete the journey to the end, when many times I could have been pipped at the post and let anger and bitterness back! I really thought that I would be completely free *after* mum died and was surprised how much I really missed her. I realised I had already been free. True forgiveness frees the person who has been the victim. Rest in peace, dear Mum.

Today society has become more aware of the vulnerability of children and it is up to each one of us to protect them by contacting Child Protection agencies should you have any concerns regarding their welfare.

Copies of this booklet are available free from:  
lambsongs@orcon.net.nz

## Foot Prints

One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the Lord. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene, he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand; one belonging to him, and the other to the Lord.

When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand. He noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in his life.

This really bothered him and he questioned the Lord about it. "Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way. But I have noticed during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of foot-prints.

I don't understand why when I needed you most you would leave me.

The Lord replied, "My precious, precious child,

I love you and would never leave you.

During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints,

It was then that I carried you.

