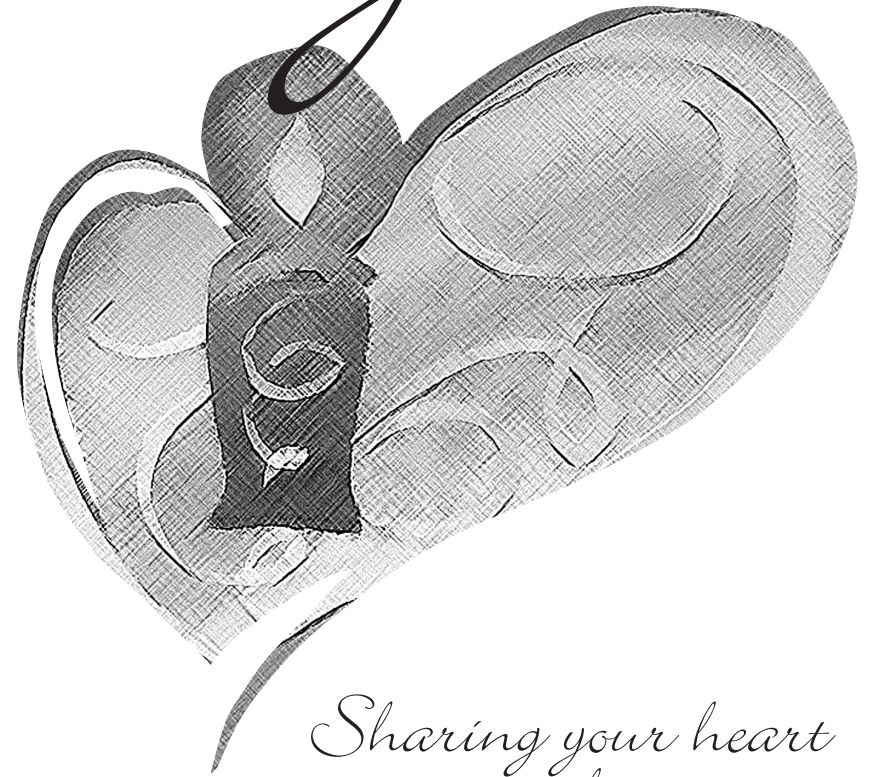


GROWING UP
girl

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*Sharing your heart
with your mom*

EILEEN PETTYCREW

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*For Annie Pettycrew
and Elena Jo Pettycrew*

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Getting Started

One time when I was about five years old, I was eating lunch with my mom, my brother, and my sister. A big jar of mayonnaise sat on the table in front of me. For no apparent reason I picked up a spoon, stuck it in the jar, and plopped a glob of mayonnaise into my hair. Nobody noticed. I did it again and again, until I had a pile of mayonnaise on top of my head. I smeared it around like sudsy shampoo, letting the slimy goo squeeze out through my fingers. Finally my sister saw me. “Mommy!” she shouted. “Eileen put mayonnaise in her hair!” My mom took one look at me, let out a wail, grabbed my arm, and marched me to the sink for the first of many hair washings. My scalp was sore when she finished.

Why did I put mayonnaise in my hair? I have no idea. I just wanted to, that’s all. Maybe I wanted attention. I got attention all right—a lot more than I bargained for! This story tells me something about me. This story lives in my heart.

How about you? What did you love to do when you were a little girl? What happy events come to mind? What outrageous things did you do? These experiences are *your* stories.

Now think of your life this very minute. Are you worried about next week’s math test? Did your best friend start ignoring you today and whispering about you to the other girls? Is there a boy at your table who taunts you, telling you over and over how stupid you are? Are you nervous about your part in the

school play? Are you excited and scared about singing a solo in the school chorus performance? These are also your stories.

All your stories live in your heart, in the place where you keep your secret thoughts and dreams. This is also the place where God lives inside you. As you grow, day by day, your stories collect in your heart.

Your life is like a spool of thread. From the instant you were born, your thread began to unwind from the spool, minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, year by year, until it is where you are today. Your thread does not always unspool in a straight line. It might tangle, knot, twist, or coil. As your thread unwinds from the spool, your tangles, knots, twists, and coils—*your stories*—unfold and live on in your heart. Your stories become a part of who you are. They are the thread of you.

Believe it or not, your mother was a little girl once too. She was also a girl your age, growing into a woman. Your mom's thread still is continuously unwinding from *her* spool. She has her own tangles, knots, twists, and coils in her thread—her stories—that she has lived throughout her life. Your mother's stories continue to unfold moment by moment, just as your stories do.

It may be even harder for you to believe that your mother is still trying to grow up. She has not reached a magical age where she has all the mysteries of life figured out. There is no such age! She does not have all the answers. She makes mistakes. She gets confused. Like you, your mother has challenges and heartaches to face. She has times when she would rather not have to grow up. She has moments when she needs comfort, love, and courage.

What if you could talk with your mother and the two of you could share the stories that live in your hearts? What if you could meet your mother in a place where your hearts could

come into view? What if you could peek into each other's world and learn about who the other really is? What if you could feel comforted, accepted, and understood, no matter what troubles you shared? What if by telling your stories you could discover how your thread intertwines with God?

Sparks in the Dark

Think about your bedroom when it's dark. Can you recall times when your mother tucked you in for the night, times when your room was so dark you could barely see her? What did that feel like? Did you feel safe, loved, and special? What if you were to invite your mother to share stories with you in the cozy safety of your dark bedroom?

Story sharing in the dark can be magical. As your mother tells a story, sparks appear. In the flash of light, you glimpse the girl your mother once was. You see that your mother had a real life that began many years before you were born. You understand that your mother may have gone through the kinds of difficulties and painful moments you are facing now. You discover you are not alone with your problems.

You begin to feel safe enough to share your own stories, trusting your mother to hear you with an open heart. Your stories send off their own sparks, and your mother catches a glimpse of the real you. You get the courage to tell her about the boy at school who taunts you. You confide your worry about next week's test. A problem you have held inside for weeks makes its way to the surface, and you tell your mom about it, knowing she will understand.

Does story sharing in the dark mean you tell your mother everything? It can. It can also mean that you will share with your mother only what you need to share. If that means keeping a few

treasured secrets tucked away, secrets that you share only with the locked pages of your journal, that is your privilege.

Candle in the Corner

If you ever were a safety patrol guard at your school, you know that your job was to keep kids safe as they crossed the street. Wearing a neon-colored vest, holding out a large bright flag, you entered the crosswalk, signaling to oncoming cars that they needed to stop and let the children cross to safety. The children depended on you to keep them safe.

You and your mother need to feel safe to share what is in your hearts, as safe as little girls crossing the street under the sharp eye of the safety patrol guard. You both must feel protected from the oncoming cars of interruptions, misunderstandings, and judgments. On page 19 you will find “Guidelines for Safe and Secure Sharing.” Abiding by these rules will help protect both you and your mom from negative interactions that could threaten your sense of safety and security.

“Quick Safety Guide,” a summary of the safe and secure sharing guidelines, appears on page 20. You and your mom can use this guide for an easy review each time you gather to share sacred space. One way to do this is to light a candle together when your mom enters your room. Set the candle in a corner of your room, and, by its light, read the “Quick Safety Guide” aloud. This “reading of the rules” can become a part of your ritual together. Also, as you share your stories, the candle in the corner will remind you both that God is present.

How This Book Works

Each chapter focuses on a challenging part of growing up and is divided into the following sections:

Looking Back

This section presents a little girl’s story and a young teen’s story from the lives of real mothers.* Throughout the book, mothers look deep within their hearts to share tender, happy, and painful moments from their growing-up years. The stories show us that a mother’s life takes root long before she becomes a mother, and she has a unique thread of her own, just as you do.

Finding the Thread

In this section we sift through the two stories to expose the thread of the real girl that lives through them. We search for signs of the little girl in the teen girl and in the woman she grew up to be. We ponder how the thread of the girl is intertwined with God.

Talk Time

In “Talk Time” you invite your mother to join you in the darkness of your bedroom to share your own stories. Questions that relate to the particular topic of the chapter will help you and your mom get started with your story-sharing conversation.

Before you ask your mother to join you for “Talk Time,” consider these ideas:

Find the best way for you to invite your mother to your bedroom. A fancy handmade invitation with an RSVP, an e-mail message written as poetry, a hand-delivered note on a plate of fruit, a phone call, or a face-to-face request are all ways you might try.

Ask for a time that fits into your schedules. About twenty or thirty minutes before your normal lights-out is a good time to start. Once you agree on a time to meet, do your best to honor your commitment to each other.

* To protect the privacy of the mothers who share their stories in this book, I have changed their names.

Give this book to your mother and request that she read any chapter you have marked—the chapter that holds the most meaning for you this particular day.

Ask your mom to leave her “parent shoes” at the door when she comes to your room. Make it clear that your mom needs to step out of her role as a parent for a while in order to remember the girl she once was. If you think your mom might have a hard time taking off her parent shoes, ask her to bring along a doll or stuffed toy—her own from childhood or one of yours that she is fond of (with your permission, of course). Tell her you will have your favorite doll or stuffed toy with you too. Holding a doll while she talks may help your mom to slip more easily out of her role as your parent.

Candlelight Connection

After you have shared your stories, the candle in the corner takes on a bigger role. In “Candlelight Connection” you or your mother will carry the candle from its corner to a space between the two of you. As you sit across from each other, your faces glowing in the candlelight, you are invited to pray together, using the prayer written in the chapter or one of your own. After the prayer you can join hands and share a few minutes of silence. When you are ready, blow out the candle, share a hug with your mom, and go to sleep.

You and your mom may want to shop together for your candle. You could find one you both like and decorate it with wax cutouts that you make yourself or find at a craft store. The heat of your fingers softens the wax shapes so they stick to the candle. Or you may want to make your own candle from a candle-making kit. Of course, you may find a candle you like and buy it just the way it is.

This is a special time to share with your mom. Keeping your candle in your room and lighting it only when you share

sacred space with your mom is a good way to honor your time together.

Sharing Summary

For easy review, a list of the steps involved in the sharing ritual appears on page 18. Refer to this summary whenever you need a quick refresher before you begin.

Practical Use of This Book

This book is for you to read and share with your mother. If you do not live with your mom, consider sharing the book during those times you are together. If your mom is no longer in your life, this book can be shared with the woman who is most like a mother to you.

Once you have read the introduction, encourage your mother to read it too so that she will have a general sense of the sacred sharing process. After she has read the introduction, your mother may want to invite you to a time of sharing. If she does, be open to her suggestion—just remember that you get to choose the chapter you want to talk about!

You can decide when you need to schedule “Talk Time” with your mother. Some days your thread will unspool in a straight line, and you will feel happy and content. Other days, your thread will knot or tangle, and you will feel sad, afraid, lonely, or angry. You will need comfort in your misery.

Depending on what is happening in your life, you may need daily or weekly conversations. Other times, a once- or twice-a-month “Talk Time” may be enough. It is up to you. Even if you do not have “Talk Time” with your mom every day, try to fit in “Candlelight Connection” as often as possible. It takes only a few minutes, and the reward is a closeness with God that you and your mom can share.

Other Ways to Use This Book

Although this book presents a way to share meaningful time and stories with your mother, you can use this book in any way that suits you best. Here are a few ideas for you to consider:

Together with your mother, light a candle in the darkness. Take turns reading the chapter of your choice. Share a time of silence with each other.

In the candlelit darkness, read the stories from the chapter you have chosen. Take turns sharing what you would have done if you were the girl in the stories.

After you read a chapter, write what you are feeling about it. Light a candle with your mother and ask her to read what you have written. Afterward, pray together or join hands and share the silence.

Gather some paper along with crayons, markers, or colored pencils. Light a candle together and read the stories aloud from the chapter you chose. Take a few moments to draw the image or picture that the stories stir in you. Ask your mother to make a drawing as well. Take turns talking about what you both have drawn. Or you might want to exchange your drawings without speaking, allowing the silence to be the gentle holder of your feelings.

Some Final Thoughts

This book is your invitation to talk, laugh, cry, and pray with your mother. It offers you a chance to get to know each other in a way you may not have thought possible. It is your window to yourself—the thread of you—and to your future as a woman. As you and your mother share your stories, it is my hope that you will enjoy many heart-to-heart conversations throughout your lives.

Peace and blessings as you grow into a life rich with possibility, fulfillment, and grace.

—*Eileen Pettycrew*
Portland, Oregon

Sharing Summary

1. Choose the chapter your heart is most drawn to. Read “Looking Back” and “Finding the Thread.”
2. Read “Talk Time.” Think about the stories you would like to share. Decide what questions you would like to ask your mom.
3. Ask your mom to read the chapter as well.
4. Choose a time for sharing.
5. Invite your mom to your bedroom.
6. Place a lighted candle in the corner. Turn off the lights.
7. Review the “Quick Safety Guide.”
8. “Talk Time”:
Share your stories.
9. “Candlelight Connection”:
Place the candle between you and your mom.
Say the prayer together.
Sit in silence for a few minutes.
Blow out the candle.
Share a hug with your mom and go to sleep.

Guidelines for Safe and Secure Sharing

When you come together in the darkness, prepare your heart to listen. Imagine that your heart is opening up like a poppy, ready to drink in the warming rays of the sun.

Let the other person express her feelings without fear of being shut down. Feelings are neither good nor bad; they just are. Even if you do not understand how the other person can feel a certain way about something, accept her feelings as a part of who she is. It does not help to respond, “You shouldn’t feel that way,” no matter how well-meaning the comment.

Wait until the other person is finished sharing before speaking. Avoid interrupting to state your opinion or interject your own experience.

Get in the habit of offering a kind gesture—a gentle squeeze of the hand or a soft pat on the shoulder—when the other is finished sharing.

Give yourself time to respond after you have heard a story. Saying nothing is often the best response when you do not know what to say. Let the silence settle between you like a soft blanket, knowing that God is present within it. Trust that any words you need to say will come to you at the right moment.

When it’s your turn to talk, give yourself permission to reveal only what you feel right about sharing. Check in with your heart before you speak, and trust what your heart tells you.

Give each other the freedom to share with complete confidence. You may want to make an agreement that certain things you reveal during “Talk Time” will not be shared outside of the room.

Above all, enjoy each other as God enjoys you. You are precious in God’s eyes.

Quick Safety Guide

1. Prepare your heart to listen.
2. Accept the other person's feelings without judgment.
3. Wait until the other person is finished sharing before speaking.
4. Offer a kind gesture when the other person is finished sharing.
5. Give yourself time to respond after you have heard a story.
6. Reveal only what you feel right about sharing.
7. Allow each other to share in complete confidence.
8. Enjoy each other as God enjoys you.

Chapter 1 *tangles* When Your Body Changes

Looking Back

These stories come from my childhood years in California.

A Little Girl's Story

I climbed on the bus and found a seat close to the front. I smoothed my pink gingham dress and crossed my ankles, settling in for the ride to kindergarten. Uh-oh, I thought. It's Friday and I forgot to wear long pants.

Friday was tumbling day, and Mrs. Hultz said girls could tumble on the mats as long as we remembered to wear pants. I loved Fridays. It meant I could stand on my head, something I could do better than anybody in the class. I shrugged. Oh, well! I wasn't about to let a little detail like forgetting to wear pants keep me from performing my favorite trick in front of everybody.

When I got to school there was a visitor in the classroom. Mrs. Hultz introduced her and said our visitor would be staying with us for the entire morning. I shivered with excitement. This

was even better! I couldn't wait to show our visitor how I could stand on my head. Wouldn't she be surprised! I watched the clock all morning. The minutes passed by so slowly. At rest time I wiggled and tossed on my pink rug, while eyeing the other kids lying still on their rugs. How could they do that? It felt as if there were jumping beans in my stomach that were keeping me in constant motion. All I could think about was convincing Mrs. Hultz to let me do a headstand, especially today of all days when I had a visitor to show off for.

At last Mrs. Hultz signaled two boys to push the chairs and tables back and roll out the mat. I tried hard not to squirm as I sat with the other kids on the floor. Mrs. Hultz stood at one corner of the mat with our visitor. I knew what I had to do.

I skipped to Mrs. Hultz. "Can I please do a headstand, Mrs. Hultz? Please?" I pleaded. I just had to stand on my head today. I just had to. I wanted her to understand how important it was to me.

I could see Mrs. Hultz's eyes soften behind her glasses. "Well . . .," she began. I was afraid to move. Would she say yes? Mrs. Hultz glanced at our visitor and back to me. I could see she was thinking about it. "Well . . . okay," she said. I could tell she wasn't sure it was a good idea, but she had said yes. Thrilled, I bounced away before she could change her mind.

I made my way to the center of the mat. The room was suddenly quiet. I took my time, eating up each delicious second that I had everyone's attention. I placed my hands on the mat, planted my head in just the right spot, and whoompf! I kicked up my legs and held them together, straight as arrows over my head. The skirt of my dress puddled around my head, forming a perfect pink tent. I knew my underwear was showing, but I didn't care.

Nobody said a word. Seconds ticked by, then minutes. I was determined to stay up as long as I could to really impress our

visitor. My head began to pound as blood rushed to it and my pink tent heated up. Now I imagined my dress was a hot air balloon, carrying me above the clouds. Through the pink I heard whispers from my classmates.

"It's time to get down now, Eileen," Mrs. Hultz called out.

What? She wants me to stop? I just got started! I pretended I didn't hear her.

"Get down now," repeated Mrs. Hultz, louder this time.

I straightened my legs even more and pointed my toes to the ceiling. How could she ask me to get down now? My magnificent pink balloon carried me even higher. The whispers turned into giggles and shouts.

"Eileen, get down!" boomed Mrs. Hultz.

I could have stayed up forever, but I didn't want Mrs. Hultz to be angry with me. I put down one leg, then the other, flipped up my dizzy head, and shook it. With a whoosh of hot air, my soaring pink balloon collapsed. A sea of faces swam into view. Catching the eye of our visitor, I flashed her a big grin. I was so proud of myself.

A Young Teen's Story

I loved to sing in the school choir. I especially loved choir practice during Advent—the Christmas carols were my favorites. Sister taught us beautiful harmonies that transformed us into a heavenly host of angelic voices.

In my seventh-grade year, I noticed a disturbing change. As I poured my heart into my singing, sweat would pour from my underarms and soak my school blouse and sweater. After every choir practice, I returned to the classroom with wet, uncomfortable underarms. Even more disturbing was the odor I noticed.

Could others smell it too? Though I convinced myself that they couldn't, I became self-conscious about raising my hand in class.

Every morning before choir practice I told myself I would not sing my heart out. I promised myself to take it easy and not get carried away. However, as soon as I found my place in the choir loft, as soon as Sister raised her arms to direct us, as soon as my aunt played the first notes on the organ, I was lifted into the clouds. I sang with my whole heart, my whole soul, my whole being, and my sweat glands belted out their own accompaniment. Singing with half a heart was impossible, so I decided I would live with my soggy underarms.

One afternoon in class, after an especially rousing morning in choir practice, Sister read to us from Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. If Christmas carols had the top spot on my list of favorite things, the story of Scrooge was a close second. Inside the warm and cozy classroom, protected from the cold gray afternoon, I sat at my desk in the front row, savoring the story Sister read with such expression.

Sister paused to ask the class a question. Hands shot up, including mine. Sister called on David, who sat across the row from me. David stood up to answer, and to my horror I saw he was holding his nose. I knew what he smelled was me! My face burned with a flush that crept up from my toes. I caught a glimpse of Sister. Her mouth twitched, and I knew she was trying hard not to smile.

I wished I could disappear into the pages of my Scrooge book. David was just plain rude. I wanted to pull out his frizzy brown hair by the roots. How could he be so nerdy? I was mad at Sister too. How could she think it was funny? How could she even think of smiling when I was so humiliated?

There was no way I could tell my mother when I got home. I was too embarrassed. Certainly no one else in the world had a problem like mine. I felt like a freak. The worst part of it was

that choir practice would never be the same for me. How could I sing like I wanted to sing if I had to worry about stinking up the whole classroom?

That night I searched for a sweater that did not smell. I couldn't find one. In despair I threw myself on the bed and cried. For the next few days I hid my heart during choir practice and sang with a weak, lifeless voice. I kept my arms clamped to my sides in class, fearing that someone else would notice the odor.

Finally, my mother noticed my problem and bought me a powerful deodorant. After using it awhile, I again found the courage to sing with my whole heart, my whole soul, and my whole being. I raised my hand in class without worrying and got over being angry with Sister. My anger with my body for changing and causing me so much grief, though, took a little longer to disappear.

Finding the Thread

Has there ever been a time in your life when everything was going along great and then suddenly everything began to go wrong? That happened to me as a young teen when I developed my odor problem. I suffered intense humiliation and felt betrayed by my own body. Not only that, I felt deprived of one of my greatest pleasures: singing with every part of my being. I became sick at heart. My life, my thread, had become massively tangled.

Things were much different when I was a kindergartner. Then I was determined to let nothing keep me from what I loved to do. I was not embarrassed about showing my underwear to my teacher, the visitor, and the class on the tumbling