

Preface

Franklin Delano Roosevelt said, “When you get to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on.” Faith is the knot that has allowed my family and my community to hang on through some extraordinary challenges.

Faith is what allowed Lillian Brown to survive sitting on a sweltering rooftop for nineteen hours in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. It was the same faith that allowed her to return and struggle to rebuild her flood-damaged home. I will never forget the peace this Katrina survivor exhibited in an interview I had with her months after the storm, when she was seventy-one years old. Lillian Brown said, “Survival is a wonderful thing with the help of God, because we never know what we can do until we are pushed to the edge.”

Again and again, I have been pushed to the edge. In the spring of 2002, I had just released my first novel, *Angelvision*. The idea had come to me in a dream about a young man who was angry with God after his younger brother was killed in an accident. For years, I worked on this novel, studying Bible scriptures dealing with death and Heaven. Pelican Publishing Company published the book. On the day of my first book signing, my husband, Willie, complained of a stomach ache. That was Saturday. The following Monday, my husband was in the hospital.

Willie was diagnosed with stage four colon cancer that had metastasized into the liver. Willie Craft, my husband, mentor, and

best friend, died the day before Thanksgiving of that same year. One of my mother’s favorite hymns that she often played on the piano and sang in our living room was “He knows just how much we can bear.” I believe God gave me *Angelvision* as a way to strengthen me for what lay ahead and to bore into my mind and spirit that this life is not all there is.

Willie worried as he neared death about leaving our beautiful children. Judith was a freshman in college, Kelly, a freshman in high school, and our youngest child, Jeremiah, was only in second grade. But I believe all of Willie’s worries disappeared after he left this life. Shortly after his funeral, Willie appeared to me in a dream. Beaming with joy, my husband said, “If I knew then what I know now, I never would have worried about anything.” You might say that it was just a dream. I don’t think so. I believe it was a confirmation of what I had learned writing *Angelvision*. The best is yet to come!

The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. The Shepherd guided my children and me through the loss of Willie, the death of my beloved father, Lawrence Roberts, two years later, and the destruction of our home and community in the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina one year after that. Our Shepherd brought us through my baby sister, Robin’s, medical challenges. Robin was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2007. By the grace of God, Robin beat it. But, five

years later, she received the earth-shaking news that the radiation and chemotherapy that had cured her of cancer had caused another disease that we had never heard of. Robin had myelodysplastic syndrome (MDS), a blood-production disorder that can lead to leukemia. Robin needed a bone marrow transplant.

Fortunately, I was the perfect genetic match for Robin. In August 2012, while Hurricane Isaac was bearing down on my hometown, I was at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York City. The nurses successfully harvested my stem cells for Robin.

The next day, tragedy struck our family again. Mama died.

We made it home in time to see our mother one last time. Mama never took her eyes off of Robin. She couldn't speak, but her eyes communicated to Robin that everything would be okay. God blessed Mama to stay here until she was satisfied that her baby daughter, Robin, had what she needed. The next week, Robin went into the hospital to prepare for the transplant to, by God's grace, receive a new lease on life.

And yes, He knows just how much we can bear. I had someone to hold my hand through Robin's illnesses and mourning Mama's death. My son, Jeremiah, would have a dad to steer him through adolescence into manhood. Ron Nabonne, a family friend, boarded up the doors of my flood-damaged house after Katrina and ultimately opened my heart. I was blessed to marry this prince of a man in 2007.

So now I ask you, what do *you* do when life has disappointed you or when things have not worked out as you planned? I don't know why you picked up this little book of hope. I do know one thing for sure: you are facing something. My sister Robin says that she can't complain about her health challenges because everyone is dealing with something.

Regardless of your wealth, race, residence, or religion, you are going through *something*, and if it is important to you, then it matters. Working in television news for more than three decades, I've experienced thousands of live broadcasts. In fact, all of us are in the middle of a live shot. Life is live! There are no tape delays or instant replays. You've got to live and give it all you've got. You've got to care and bear a whole heck of a lot, because life is live!

What do you do when pushed to the edge? You trust God to give you wings. How do you trust God? By remembering who He is. My sister Dorothy and I flew numerous times from New Orleans to New York this past year to be with Robin, and never once did we cringe in fear during the loud roar of the plane at takeoff or pace the aisles worrying that the heavy aircraft wouldn't carry us to our destination. We had confidence in the pilot. Why not trust the ultimate Pilot in guiding you to your destination, too?

This type of faith doesn't come naturally. It takes time and encouragement. When I was just starting out as a reporter in New Orleans, I was always second-guessing myself and had very little confidence. Each morning before leaving for work, Willie would look me in the eyes and say, "The Power is *on!*" This was his way of calming my insecurities and reminding me to trust God.

It took me years to truly comprehend the enormity of this Power, but I had an awakening. The Buddhist proverb rang true: When the student is ready, the teacher will appear. For me, the Teacher appeared in January 1991 in my darkened bedroom. I was in my thirties and the early morning newscast that I anchored had just been canceled because of a downturn in the economy. I thought I was going to lose my job at WWL-TV. I was alone and desperately needed someone to talk to—but who? Then, as my parents had

taught me by their example, I decided to pray. But that didn't ease my anxiety, so I pulled out a notebook and I wrote a letter to God.

I carefully wrote down my laundry list of concerns and ended the tear-stained letter with "Amen." Out of the blue, an unusual thought came to mind: "Now listen." That day, I sat quietly, and something wonderful happened. Comforting thoughts began to fill my mind. They were so encouraging that a refreshing peace washed over me. I began writing down the thoughts as quickly as they occurred to me. That day, I started the first of what would become countless Prayer and Listening Journals.

That day in January 1991 transformed my relationship with prayer. I see prayer now as two-way communication. God's voice is not like a human voice. The Holy Spirit speaks to the heart. It's hard to explain—I just feel His direction and His love. Now, I enjoy taking time to pray, read the Bible, and then sit quietly. I write down my prayers and I write down what I receive from the Holy Spirit. From time to time, I reread old journals. They are a constant reminder of the goodness of God and all that he has brought my family through.

This is how I connect with my Creator. This is what works for me. I'm not saying that it works for everyone—everyone's relationship with the Lord is personal and individual.

What really inspired me to write this little book of hope was my sister Robin's illness. It was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. Even though I had been through so much heartache, the thought of losing my baby sister was too much. My family and I had to press into our faith. Now, I feel the need to share what I have learned on this walk of faith. As Mama always said, "Make your mess your message."

My spirit received this message. It is for me, and I hope for you, a glorious reminder of the majesty and grace of our Creator. All through my highs and lows, I leaned heavily on this message and some of the encouraging Bible verses you will find on the pages of this book. God has a plan for your life and mine. He will guide us if we take the time to listen.

The Lord speaks to us through His creation. It is captured in the beautiful photography of my good friend and WWL-TV colleague Eric Paulsen, who has been with me through all of the ups and downs. Wherever you are on this journey of life, I hope that, as you gaze at Eric's photographs, you feel God's love for you.

Remember, God loves *you*.

Whatever you are facing today or will face in the future, be encouraged: your Power is *on!*



Lawrence and Lucimarian Roberts



Left to right: Robin, Dorothy, Sally-Ann, and Lawrence

Author's Note

This book is dedicated to my parents, Lawrence and Lucimarian Roberts.

Now that we must carry on without them, I see so many of the qualities of my parents in my wonderful siblings. Lawrence Roberts II exhibits their wisdom and resolve. Dorothy Roberts McEwen has inherited their strength and spirituality. Robin Roberts lives her life with the courage and compassion that our parents modeled for us every day of their lives.

Thank God for family.

Photographer's Note

When Sally-Ann first approached me about combining her words with my pictures, while flattered, I wasn't sure how they might correspond. Then, I began reading what she wrote and looking over some of my photographs.

I love shots of nature. From a sunset to the majesty of a mountain in Oregon to the tiniest detail of a flower, it is not hard to see the hand of God at work. Hopefully, you enjoy these pictures and Sally-Ann's words. I believe they do complement each other and illustrate her inspiring message.

I dedicate this work to my wife and best friend, Bethany.



Sunset in Italy

Acknowledgments

It is easier to start a project than to it is to finish. I would like to thank all of my family and friends who encouraged me to get to the finish line. I thank God for my loving children: Jeremiah Craft; Kelly and her husband, Jeremy Tatum; and Judith Craft and my soon-to-be son-in-law Tony Champagne Jr. I also thank God daily for my grandson, Elijah Tatum, who knew how to pray from the heart by the age of five. It's something that was honed into him by his prayer-warrior grandmother Carol Tatum and great-grandmothers Ella Mae Craft, Gloria Bush, and Lucimarian Roberts.

Thank you, Lord, for my daily prayer partners: my wonderful sister-in-law Phyllis Alexander and dear friends Cathy Harris and Pattie Shoener. I thank God for all of my prayer-warrior friends and family, including but not limited to Lisa Martin, Al Mims, and my sister-in-law Claudette Griggs, who has a knack for sending inspirational text messages when I need them most. My father-in-law, Pierre André Nabonne, a World War II veteran and Bronze Star recipient, continues to bless me with his wit and wisdom.

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I am eternally grateful to my husband, Ron Nabonne, for joining me in life's adventure. Thank you, Lord, for this gift.

Finally, I thank God for the doctors, nurses, and technicians who worked tirelessly to save the life of my baby sister, Robin.



Water lilies in Uptown New Orleans, Louisiana

Your Power
Is On!

*Be still and know that I am God.
I am, I am.*



In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.

And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

Genesis 1:1-3 (KJV)



Bird soaring over Poplarville, Mississippi

*I created this world and everything in it.
I gave life to you and to every other living
thing, plant and animal.*



The grass withers, the flower fades,
But the word of our God stands forever.

Isaiah 40:8 (NASB)