

A Woman's Mind Half Naked

by Jennifer Ann Gordon

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*I joyfully
dedicate this book
to Beautiful Betty. Our
last few days together
were pure bliss. I love
you, BB! Live on.*

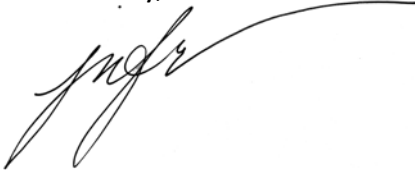
A Woman's Mind Half Naked

I Love You Welcome to my heart's village!

I want to hear your story, to hold you in my arms, to listen to you without judgment. I want us to laugh and cry together. I want to feel hope with you. It doesn't matter who you are or where you live, what your job title is or what lies in your past. We are connected. I care that you are well and have what you need. I care that you feel your value and importance in this family we call humanity.

Writing to you is a fun camping trip. A solitary trek inward. A chuckle. A hard cry. An opera. A fabulous meal in a French café. Lavender honey right from the comb. Standing barefoot on a packed dirt floor. Dancing with abandon. More than anything else, writing to you is my hug filled with hope for our journey together.

Affectionately,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Jennifer', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Universe Traveler I am a universe traveler. Yes! I've circled around the sun at the breakneck speed of 67,000 miles per hour quite a few times now. And I've never felt newer or more like a blushing bride of life than I feel right now. After three children, two marriages and a million invaluable lessons and experiences in love, business and staying authentic, I am a self-proclaimed *virgin*.



A Virgin Again “Virgin” has a lot of definitions. My favorite is “an uncaptured or unconquered place or thing.” I love the idea of being both an *uncaptured* and *unconquered* place. I feel new and strong. I don’t care what others think of me . . . mostly. I have learned how not to take things personally. I love open-ended questions. Finally, I understand that life doesn’t need to be tied up with a neat little bow or explained. I rejoice in recognizing and challenging my own assumptions.



Fifty Percent Ain't Bad I'm pretty secure at least fifty percent of the time. The other fifty is buoyed by precious friends and the fact that I know how to observe my thoughts without fear. I am curious. Joyfully, I share with you that I've had the proverbial shit kicked out of me over the years. Thank goodness. Having traveled from "Good Christian" to "Fallen Angel," from "Great Student" to "College Drop-Out"—you get the gist—I don't regret a thing. I have been freed from the idea that God is keeping score, tallying up points and hovering over my shoulder all the time just waiting to condemn me or pat me on the back. And I am seriously uninterested in going to a club where only a few are welcomed while the bouncers keep everyone else back.

Freedom Begins The biggest burden I had to bear over the years during this liberating process was that of my own arrogance. I began my twenties knowing everything about God. Because I knew everything about God, I also knew everything about people, what they should or should not do or what they really needed to be thinking to be more like, ahem, *me*.

I had never questioned anything I was taught about God until age 29 when my dad died. Two days after I found out he was so ill, he was gone. His last words to me? “I am so frightened.” My heart broke, and out poured all the questions that had been waiting in the wings. My honest inquiry began.



Macaroni and Cheese The macaroni and cheese did it. I opened the refrigerator. It was filled with little dishes of food that my mom had prepared for my dad, trying to get him to eat something . . . *anything*. The macaroni and cheese was crusted over and dried out. I just stared at it. It became my icon for what my marriage felt like. My exact thought was probably a lot like many people's thoughts when they are facing the death of a loved one: *Life is too short to spend being miserable*. I was done. Two months later I separated from my husband.



Letting Go of the Oars I stuffed my intuition in a metal box, locked it, and then hid it in the garage behind the recycling. Although I tripped over it on occasion, I never unpacked it fully to polish and place on my heart's mantel. Had a beautiful baby girl. Got married again. Had two glorious baby boys. Almost died of a broken heart. More stuff happened. I became a single full-time mom and breadwinner with no college degree, no job, no place to live, no money, no car and no confidence. My life was a canvas. I moved forward brushstroke by brushstroke. I began to spread my sail to let the wind power me, rather than frantically rowing my boat in circles.



Angels with Arms My favorite fortune

cookie message is this: *It is better to be angel with arms than angel with wings.*

I call kind people *Angels-with-Arms*. The angel-director of the preschool who pulled me aside to tell me my one- and four-year-old sons could attend gratis. The angel-gentleman at church who had an extra car I could “test drive” for six months. Then there was the angel-director of the YMCA who gave me a big hug, refused my offer to work in exchange for a membership and then gave me a full year’s membership free and clear. My angel-brother and angel-friends. Angel-artists and angel-authors, too. Angel-grandma. Angel-landlords and angel-clients.

A special mention must be given to *Angels-by-Inverse*, those dear folks who made my life so difficult that I had to dig deep within for strength, to seek help rather than be my normally reclusive self.

My life is truly a testament to the compassion, kindness and generosity of most people. Each day overflows with love and brilliance. It really does take an entire village of angels to raise a child.

Gratitude Saves My Neck I roll out my red carpet every day for interesting people, thoughts, ideas, inspiration, music, art, books and other sumptuous gifts to walk into my life. During both great and seriously difficult times, gratitude is my lifeline to sanity and balance. Yep, my red carpet is gratitude. I run, skip, hop on one foot or sashay down this carpet joyfully to greet the moment. Sometimes I cry en route to gratitude.

This is how it works. (Note: most of this I learned by inverse.) Rather than make reactionary decisions based on what I don't have, gratitude grounds me and lets me begin with a positive . . . what I have on hand.

The *big moment*, my epiphany—to always begin with gratitude—splashed me when I was at my lowest point. Life seemed too hard. I was depressed. I was so sad. Just as I fantasized driving into a big oak tree at a hundred miles per hour, my plan of action unfurled before my very eyes: *Look for every little good thing around you. Make your days an endless treasure hunt for the beautiful, the delightful, the loving.* It felt good to have a plan of action.

I began immediately. When I started to get depressed again, I'd look for even more good, even if I started with something really small like, "I am glad I put the toilet paper on the holder, rather than let it sit on the floor by the toilet." Or, "I am *thankyoufull* there is air." Just about anything to break the fear inertia and get my gratitude momentum rolling.

Gratitude leads to creative solutions. Gratitude is the precursor to abundance and harmony. Borrowing from American Express, "I never leave home without it."

Beautiful Husbands Everywhere

Jerry and his wife, Moni, are among my favorite neighbors. We have a *happywavinghello* relationship sprinkled with the occasional chat on the road. I treasure my moments with them.

One morning, and for the first time ever, Jerry knocked on my door. He was on a mission. Through our high-speed country neighborhood grapevine (which puts the fastest Internet connectivity to shame) Jerry had heard that one of our other neighbors was less than polite to me. This Angel-by-Inverse is notorious in our small neighborhood community for his violent outbursts and irrational behavior. My son's trumpet playing had annoyed this man and he tromped to my front door to launch a full verbal assault on my character and parenting skills, especially me being a single mother.

Angel-Jerry's mission: "Jennifer, I came over to tell you that you are a wonderful

mom! Your children have restored my faith in children. What he did was illegal. If anyone approached and talked to my wife the way he talked to you, I would have shot him. If he ever sets one foot on your property again, call the sheriff.”

At this precise moment, it hit me. My husband is . . . many men. I have beautiful husbands everywhere. For far too long, I entertained the sorrowful misconceptions that I needed a husband, and also that I had no husband. Not true on either account.

Every day holds many gallant, thoughtful, protective and tender expressions by many men in my professional life and personal circles, and even complete strangers. Someday I'll have to write a book entitled *My Husbands*.



My Grocery-Store Husband

Several years ago, I'd reached a very difficult time in my life. My children and I had just been evicted in retaliation for my insistence that our landlord keep his promises of repair. To top this off, we had a dog that went berserk whenever she was away from me. I had no choice but to turn the dog in to the animal shelter. She had been my hiking buddy and my constant companion. My heart turned to dust. I watched her watch me leave her. I cried uncontrollably.

I needed to go to the grocery store, but dreaded what I call the "gauntlet of kindness." I prayed that no one ask me if I needed help finding something, or how I was, as I was in danger of losing my tenuous composure and crying again. Much to my dismay, the manager approached and asked, "How are you today?" With my lips pursed, I replied, "Can't talk, will cry." The manager responded, "Oh, what's wrong?" At that

point I lost it completely. Tears streamed down my face. My nose ran. I had the dry heaves. I told him my story.

Then he did something extraordinary. He held open his arms. I went to him. He wrapped his arms around me tightly and didn't let go for what seemed to be a very long time. I held on for dear life. I got snot and tears and drool all over his shoulder.

When I calmed down, he said, "Look at me. You did the right thing. Everything is going to be all right. You are a remarkable woman. You did the right thing." This man's compassion greatly comforted me. My *grocery-store husband* gave me hope.

As I continued with my shopping, he chased me with handfuls of soft pink tissue. "I thought you might need these," he said. Although I never saw him again, his act of kindness stayed with me and helped long after that day.