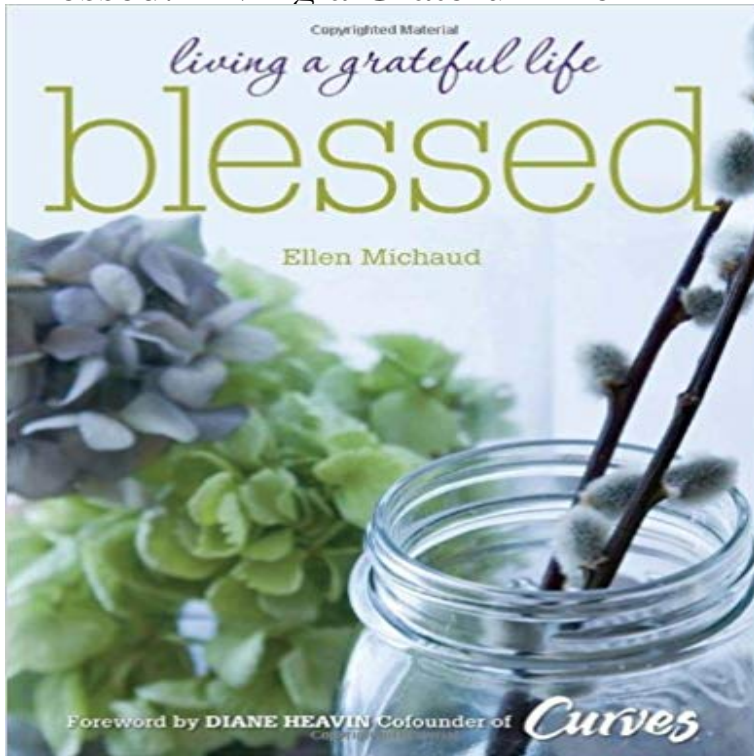


Blessed: Living a Grateful Life



Sometimes we need to pause for a moment and absorb the quiet moments in life. *Blessed* is a compelling collection of stories that are true reminders of the everyday blessings that surround us—a reminder to take a deep breath and appreciate the things that bring us joy. Whether sitting in front of the fire at her snow-covered cottage high in the mountains of her Vermont hometown, laughing with friends on the porch of a bungalow near the sea in California, gardening, baking or knitting, award-winning author Ellen Michaud offers an intimate glimpse into daily peaceful moments that frequently go unnoticed. Entries include: *The Teapot*: During a snowy winter storm, the author pulls her great-grandmother's worn silver teapot down from a shelf. As she polishes the teapot's tarnished surface, she discovers engraved hallmarks that lead to a deeper understanding of its 200-year history, and her appreciation for the women who traveled with it grows. Holding the teapot in my hands, I can feel its strength and sturdiness. I can run my fingers over its dents, study the cracks in its bone lid ornament, lightly stroke the scorch mark on its side. Was it ever dropped on a kitchen hearth? Thrown across a room? Washed by one of my grandmother's tears? Given the chaotic world through which it has traveled over the centuries, the answers are pretty obvious. The thing is, it survived. And I'm willing to bet that despite the fire, brimstone, and bullets that circle our planet today, this glowing little teapot and the women who travel with it will survive into the future as well. (Excerpt from *The Teapot*) *The Courage to Change*: After a lifetime of self-built barriers, the author's 88-year-old aunt overcomes discouraging memories and years of grief to prove that it's never too late to open yourself to new experiences, take risks, and start over. Today I watch as she carefully spreads the

napkin on her lap and explains to the hopeful dogs at her feet that, if they're good, she just might save them a bite and I realize that I no longer believe that people can't change. They can. No matter what their age, they can remodel themselves and start over. (Excerpt from *The Courage to Change*)

Summer in a Jar: On a 200-acre farm known for its Jersey cows and prizewinning cheese, two women harvest a cornucopia of produce that looks like it came from the Garden of Eden. Although the visit was intended to pick up ingredients for salsa, the end result is a view of a fertile valley, the rich smell of vegetables freshly tugged from the earth that speaks to the soul, and the natural rhythm of friendly conversation. Marjorie and I slide easily into conversation, as do women everywhere, and eventually Marjorie's tractor bumps over the ground toward the barn, stops, then rumbles into the farm's deep silence as she climbs to the ground and comes over to say hello. Clearly, she's busy as a cat with a new litter of kittens. But as she reaches out her hand to greet me, I realize that here, where the work it takes to run a farm, manage a herd, make cheese, and run a business is never done, there is always time to greet a neighbor, talk about the weather, and inquire into the nature of things. I slide into the rhythm of it without missing a beat. (Excerpt from *Summer in a Jar*)

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