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How a life in lockdown has inspired joy: we meet writer, public speaker and celebrant Dr Rebecca

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By Helen Bowman

When lockdown hit back in March of last year, many of us spiralled into a bit of a panic: what to do? How to cope? Where to turn?

But in the chaos that was the first few weeks of unfamiliarity, Dr Rebecca Williams Dinsdale stood out to those who knew her as a beacon of positivity, hope and joy.

Having suffered from chronic illness since the age of 17, Dr Rebecca is no stranger to lockdown scenarios. But her unique outlook on life has been the very lifeblood of optimism for those around her.

Tell us about your background and why lockdown is familiar to you...

I was struck down by severe ME at the age of 17, and spent the following 20 years dealing with being bed- or house-bound for anything between 12-40 weeks out of the year. My parents have both suffered varying degrees of ill health over the years too, so we've faced our fair share of suffering. Although my Dad prefers it when I use the word 'struggle', which is typical of his outlook on life.



How has this impacted your career?

I was determined not to be put off achieving my dreams, but even the modules of my degrees at Sunderland University were chosen so that I could park nearby to lectures. But I became incredibly efficient at studying – I spent a fraction of the time my fellow students did on assignments, but came top of the group at the end of the year. I went on to study a Masters and a Doctorate, all the while developing my Lifejoy strategies to help myself and others cope in the face of adversity.

My lecturers invited me to speak to my fellow students as a motivational speaker and I've since gone on to become a self-employed writer, speaker and celebrant, taking over 1,000 funeral services over the past decade.

Taking funerals must be challenging – how is it to support families during their lowest moments?

It's an absolute privilege. To find the words to lift them at such a painful time is an honour and something I enjoy hugely. Taking so many loving funerals has given me a wealth of experience of suffering, kindness, courage and resolve. I've been inspired by people who make no fuss but still want to contribute to their life, their family and their community. I've heard stories about the humblest of people who made hard, brave decisions in their wonderful lives – it's a true privilege to be part of that.



You've written a new book in lockdown – how did that come about?

When lockdown hit, I couldn't meet my lovely families and lead funeral services anymore. But I wanted to contribute and still bring hope to those who were finding this new reality particularly tricky.

I'm a member of a business club called Mint and I started writing a daily 'Lifejoy' in our group to help people hold on to the small joys of life. I also recorded a video of Sunday Lifejoy and it really seemed to help others. The book followed quite naturally.

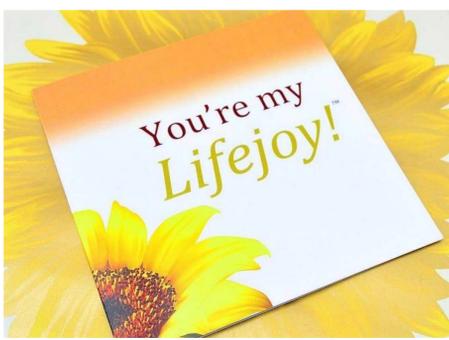
Tell us more about Your Lifejoy Year.

It was written in the early, darkest days of lockdown. It gave me a focus and has since been enjoyed by hundreds of readers in the North East and beyond.

It's written so that each of the 12 chapters focuses on the following values: love, courage, integrity, action and hope. The idea is that the book is designed to help you find the wealth of your own normality, to inspire courage and increase your capability. If you're a bit sad or stuck then I hope it will help you to help yourself.

Is it a read from cover-to-cover or more of a reference book?

Each chapter is broken down into a single day's reading. Each day might just be a couple of sentences or a page or two. Lots of my readers have told me they read each day's thought at the start of the day before even picking up their mobile phones. I think it helps instil a sense of calm and optimism.

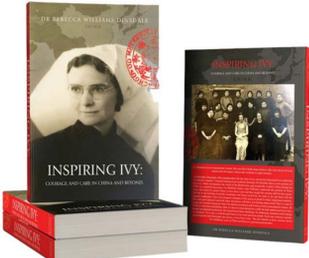


How can we get hold of a copy?

It's available to buy through the shop on my [website](#), along with my first book, *Lifejoy, your manual for resilient living*.

I'm also working on my next book: *Inspiring Ivy: Courage and care in China and beyond*, which is about my Grandma and her incredible life as a nurse. I hope that will be available from November 2021. Beyond that, I'm working on a Lifejoy journal to help my readers express themselves through journaling – and *Your Lifejoy Year part 2!*

To find out more about Dr Rebecca and her work, visit her [website](#), [Facebook](#) or [Instagram](#)



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