

# Secret Gift

Lessons on  
discovering  
happiness in  
your career,  
marriage, and  
family life.



JOANNA DURKIN

FOREWARD BY PEGGY McCOLL

## Praise for *Secret Gift*

“Awareness. Direction. Applicable process. Joanna’s decades of experience helping people become the best version of themselves is clear from the beginning of *Secret Gift*. She’s touched countless thousands of lives in multiple countries around the world. This book beautifully takes her experiences and summarizes how to become aware of who we can be, what we can truly accomplish in life, what’s the best path to get there and how to apply productive activities day to day. Invaluable for anyone wanting to be more!”

~ Shawn Gray, International Entrepreneur Presidential Master Coordinator, Shaklee Corporation

“I very much enjoyed Joanna Durkin’s new book *Secret Gift*. I found it very motivating and personally uplifting. Joanna made several great points and her examples were right on the mark. Her real-life examples evoked emotion in me several times through the book. It’s a very good read.”

~ Dave Falle, Editor, Publisher

“*Secret Gift* is Joanna Durkin’s best work yet. Joanna’s authentic and unabashed personal story inspires the reader to see for themselves how positive change is possible in our lives. She touches and moves to want more and do more because we deserve more. It is a must read and the perfect gift to give to those you love.”

~ Banafsheh Akhlaghi, Attorney and Author of International Best-Seller Beautiful Reminders ~ Anew

“Joanna Durkin’s beautiful book *Secret Gift* is the only one you need to discover yourself, embrace the change you need to make, and achieve the life of your dreams. This book is a clear, practical guide to your best future.

Start reading it today!”

~ Dr Nick Morgan

“This book is a blessing and gift to all who seek to achieve excellence in their lives. You will be challenged; You will be inspired; You will learn the tools to become your very best self. Joanna has been a long time friend to me and countless others. Read this book; savor it and grow.”

~ Marty Taub, RN, MSN, CPN, DTM, Sutter Medical Center  
Sacramento

“Joanna Durkin’s new book *Secret Gift* is inspirational and motivating. She draws on her personal life journey and years of experience in her business of coordinating exchange students from China and Taiwan to the States. A number of students she brought over attended the school where I was principal. I watched her put into practice the principles she outlines in the book. Students thrived with her personal relationship with them and hands on techniques in working to grow them to their full potential. She beautifully weaves personal experiences from her own life, that of a number of her students and practical principles and techniques she developed through her own journey to discovering her Secret Gift. I value her friendship and believe anyone who puts into practice the practical suggestions and principles she outlines in the book will be the better for it as they discover their Secret Gift. A good read!”

~ Doug Brown, Former Principal of Lodi Academy

Published by  
Hasmark Publishing,  
[www.hasmarkpublishing.com](http://www.hasmarkpublishing.com)

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First Edition

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Permission should be addressed in writing to Joanna Durkin:  
[info@secretgiftbook.com](mailto:info@secretgiftbook.com)

Cover Design: Tina Chen, [tinachen916@gmail.com](mailto:tinachen916@gmail.com)  
Editor: Justin Spizman, [justin@justinspizman.com](mailto:justin@justinspizman.com)  
2<sup>nd</sup> Line Editor: Dave Falle, [dave@hasmarkservices.com](mailto:dave@hasmarkservices.com)  
Layout Artist: Anne Karklins, [annekarklins@gmail.com](mailto:annekarklins@gmail.com)

Kelly Kinsman, [kelly.kinsman@mindfulcreative.ca](mailto:kelly.kinsman@mindfulcreative.ca)  
Author Photo: Leah Mowers, [leahmowersphoto@gmail.com](mailto:leahmowersphoto@gmail.com)

ISBN 13: 978-1-988071-74-9

ISBN 10: 1988071747

## Dedication

*To the parents who trust me to help their children study abroad.*

*Because of your trust, I have the opportunity to help them discover their purpose, vision and goals while they are studying in America.*

*Because of your support, your children have an opportunity to create their future and have their stories shared with others.*

*Because of your belief, I get to write your family's success stories here to inspire others.*

# Acknowledgments

Wayne Dyer said, “The essential lesson I've learned in life is to just be yourself. Treasure the magnificent being that you are and recognize first and foremost you're not here as a human being only. You're a spiritual being having a human experience.” I have deep gratitude to each and every person who came into my life and who allowed me to be in theirs. Their generous giving, positive influence, unconditional guidance, patience, and love inspired and empowered me to design my own experience.

To Peggy McColl, my mentor and dear friend. Her guidance and encouragement helped to bring *The Secret Gift* to the world. Peggy's mentorship has been a pleasant journey. Her simple words acted like a stream of clean energy smoothly going through my consciousness that allowed me to connect myself with all her knowledge and skills. It was pure magic. I am grateful for Peggy and her husband, Denis', friendship.

To Bob Proctor—during the summer of 2007, Bob's image and his voice came to life in our living room. That night, my husband and I made a commitment to change. Bob is a great teacher, always improving himself while encouraging others to keep improving, too. He opened my mind and changed my life forever.

To Justin Spizman, the best book architect around. Starting from nothing and moving to a finished project, he kept me focused and helped me to follow my instincts and bring this message to life. With his incredible patience guiding me through the entire process one step at the time, I was able to see a wonderful end result.

To Marty Taub, a successful leader in the health industry and four-time Distinguished Toastmaster. You are my mentor, my friend, and my accountability partner. Thank you for helping me brainstorm for this book. I am grateful for your generous love and care and your willingness to share your own personal story with my audience.

To Judy O'Beirn, who patiently worked with me to complete this project. She understood what I wanted, communicated with me often, and then followed up with me on everything I needed to do to bring this book to life. Thanks to her tremendous patience and insight for providing me with ideas along the way. Her devotion to her professionalism is truly moving.

To Jack Liu and his parents: Jack was the first student in our mentoring program. He gave me an opportunity to start my dream journey of helping children. The trust and support of his parents empowered me to help children like Jack every day of my life. It is remarkable to see that today he is happily married and living a purposeful life.

Thanks to all the parents who put their children in our hands on their incredible journey studying abroad in America. With their trust and enormous support, we were able to work closely to help them and their children achieve their goals in life. Their support helps us assist more and more children each year. We are grateful for this unbelievable journey.

Thanks to the educators, host families I've worked with in the past twenty, or more, years who provided a safe positive loving environment and opened their hearts for our children from foreign countries to achieve their goals.

To my specially friends, Glen Chau and Banafsheh Akhlaghi. They gave me strength and encouraged me to keep moving forward. I am blessed. Thank you for sharing in my vision to help children and for supporting many projects while also helping me to promote my book.

To my mother, who was a genius. She had an innate ability to create something from nothing, with no education at all. I adored her. She was a successful business owner in her twenties, survived the Civil War in China, and experienced more challenges than any one person should have to survive, but she enjoyed every moment of her life. I consciously and unconsciously moved forward from an unhappy childhood to finally learning to “just be myself.” Her voice constantly whispered in my ears: *I know it's hard, but don't you ever give up*. Yes, mom, I will not give up. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to live through your inspiration. You never gave up on me to the last day of your life. Thank you!

To my daughter, Tina, and son-in-law, Tung: Tina—you were my motivation to migrate to America, so you could grow up in a loving, happy, healthy environment. You and I always encourage and inspire each other to do what we want, keep setting new goals in every area of our life. Tung—you are a wonderful son to me. You take great care of Tina and unconditionally support me.

To my husband, Jim—with your full support, I was able to travel alone without worry. You have always been flexible and caring through our travels together. Through time changes, long flights, and occasionally, you've shown patience in sitting among a group of people speaking a foreign language and eating strange food you've never seen. You always have a big smile, patience, and empathy, which makes my job easy. I am so lucky to have you in my life. Thank you for your love, inspiration, compassion and companionship.

To my readers—thank you for your trust and for allowing me to share my life experience with you. I can assure you that as you introduce each of these steps into your life and apply them to your daily activities, your lives will change for the better.

I am grateful for everything I receive from you all!



## Foreword

Most people are living their life unfulfilled, but the truth is, living an extraordinary life is possible for everyone. In the first part of this book, *Secret Gift*, Joanna quotes Author H. Jackson Browne Jr. who said, “Sometimes the heart sees what is invisible to the eye.”

What does that really mean? The heart “sees”... what is invisible to the eye?

Inherent within all human beings is a desire for greater expansion and fuller expression of who we are. There is an inner knowing that understands that a more fulfilling and satisfying life is possible. And, if a more fulfilling, satisfying life is something you desire, you are in the right place because the author will guide you to experience precisely that.

*Secret Gift* is a true gift to anyone who reads it and applies the brilliant recommendations of this author. One of the things that I love about Joanna’s book is that the Secret Gift is revealed early in the book. She doesn’t keep the secret hidden, like an illusion that you may never understand. If anything, she helps you realize that the power within you to create is, and has always been, available to you.

When I was reading this book, I couldn’t help but think back to my miserable childhood and reflected on the time that I began to study personal development. In my effort to change my life I became a diligent student of personal development; studying every book I could get my hands on and traveling the world attending seminar after seminar. Quite possibly I had more self-help books than most public libraries carried, but what I found, at least in the early days of study, is the following ... no amount of reading books, or attending seminars will bring you anything, unless and until you apply what you learn.

Learning is only a part of growth. If you don’t apply what you learn you will never experience better results. The one thing that really stands out for me in this book, *Secret Gift*, is that chapter after chapter Joanna is giving you the clear instructions for you to make positive change. This book is unlike any other book that I have ever read. It is brilliant! Brilliantly written and crafted in a way that you can understand AND apply the ideas shared within the pages.

As you go through this book, keep a journal with you to take notes, and highlight the points that really resonate with you. You will likely find yourself feeling inspired and ready to act. The one thing that really stood out for me as I read *Secret Gift* is how complete this book is. Personally, I have read thousands of books on personal development and wrote (so far) thirteen books myself, however, it is rare to find a masterpiece such as this one that truly covers all the necessary areas for success.

Later in this book you will find that Joanna quoted Lao Tzu: “Do the difficult things while they are easy, and do the great things while they are small. A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step.” Follow the treasures you will uncover in this book and you will experience success in only glamorous ways. I love this book. I love the author and she is demonstrating her love for you by sharing this incredible special gift; YOUR Secret Gift. Read on and prosper.

Peggy McColl

*New York Times* Best-Selling Author

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# Chapter 1

## Discovering the Invisible You

*Everything in the universe has a purpose. Indeed, the invisible intelligence that flows through everything in a purposeful fashion is also flowing through you.*

– Wayne Dyer

An invisible person lives within each of us. It might be the dream version of yourself or a completely different adaptation of your current life. Perhaps you could be imagining a happier, healthier, more successful edition of what exists. We all think about who we are on a regular basis. Consequently, each of us might take affirmative steps to ensure that we reach for something more than we already have. Some people spend time in meditation and talk therapy to improve their mental balance. Still others enjoy long walks to remain healthy and strengthen their hearts and bodies.

Many people read books and blogs, scour the internet, listen to podcasts, attend seminars, participate in masterminds, work with mentors, and spend endless hours on self-improvement and development to evolve their invisible selves. Why? Because they acknowledge there is something important and tremendously valuable inside of them they'd like to project to the world.

Discovering your invisible you is a reachable and manageable process that unlocks all that is hidden but should be transparent. Author H. Jackson Browne Jr. said, "Sometimes the heart sees what is invisible to the eye." Your heart guides your *inner* to your *outer*, acting as a shining beacon that lights the path to discovering, and then projecting, your invisible self. That is the purpose of the journey in the pages ahead. Join me in this amazing passage to your future life.

### What Is Invisible Can Be Seen

We were all brought into this world completely dependent on those around us. As infants, our parents or loved ones offer us all that nurtures life—food, water, milk, a home. We have few choices during this time. However, as we develop and grow, we can choose what we want to do or be.

We are empowered to shape our own lives and make the best and most logical decisions available to each of us. If we want to be somebody or do something, we can. Growth, development, and evolution all remain at our fingertips. Thus, taking advantage of this opportunity is an important path to great happiness and success. It starts with studying ourselves and finding our place in the world around us.

As we project ourselves to the world through the process of discovery, we release a secret gift along with it. It is just a matter of when we are going to discover it. You are the only one who can do it. It is about you and no one else. The rest falls into place once you find that connection.

Everyone is searching for something, but most people don't even know what they are looking for to begin with. That is often the case because the majority of the population simply doesn't know what they really want in life. We consciously (or unconsciously) choose to follow the opinions of others regarding what we should be or do. In spite of that, recognize you hold the power within. Everything starts here and with you. If you want money, you can have money. If you want a great relationship, you will have a great relationship. If you want health, you can have health. You can have anything you think of if you are just willing to put your experiences to the side and start a new page today. I am sure this isn't news to you. We all know our experiences impact our future goals. Many great thinkers, philosophers, and therapists teach this again and again. This time, the difference is that you can take the steps required to move this from just a thought into action.

Despite our unique and various origins, including different cultures, upbringings, and beliefs, we are essentially the same. We may look different, but we are all spirits with intelligence living in a body. Intelligence lies in our beautiful minds and differentiates us from other animals. We have the ability to think, learn, and decide what we want in life. If you want to get what you want and to where you want to be, you have to be willing to do it and make a commitment to change. The moment you make that commitment, you are already taking the first step on the path to success. Follow each step, and you will have a clear picture of who you are and will eventually develop your readiness to transform your life by unleashing your invisible self.

I have experienced many challenging times. In those moments, I felt lost and alone, with no friends and no help of any kind. But even then, I

always bounced back. I wasn't aware I could control those thoughts in a positive way. I would describe my life as one that's been like riding on a rollercoaster: ups and downs, with no control over when things would start and stop. I might have had some small idea when it would go up and go down, but even then, I wasn't at the helm.

I was mystified with the information I received when I first learned about myself. I felt sad, excited, scared, and frustrated—all at the same time. I couldn't stop going back to a certain time in life and trying to justify how I could have, would have, should have done something differently. It was as if my earliest memories had shaped me to the point that I was still stuck in that mold.

I knew I had to go through a process to deal with my past. There was so much regret, anger, pain, fear, and confusion. I quickly realized there was almost no happiness present and available to me. I tried to reason with these emotions, continually telling myself these were just experiences. They couldn't impact me any longer. But I just couldn't shake these previous obstacles. I had to journey through a process to rid myself of these issues. Eventually, I found that the more I learned about me, the more I could let go of the past and see things differently to keep moving forward.

I had to overcome my worst enemies and secure a clear image of myself. I started to believe that if I wanted my life to change, I would have to first change myself. I learned to improve, ask for help, do something out of the ordinary, uncover myself, and finally step out of my own prison that was holding me captive. I rid myself of all the negative images in my mind and replaced them with wonderful memories. I finally understood I didn't need to prove how good I was to anyone because I knew exactly who I was and what I wanted. The best part of all was that I learned how to love myself and recognize the core value of me for being me.

Does that sound like something of interest to you? If you feel like your memories and experiences are holding you back in some significant way, then you should read on. This book will help you acknowledge these demons and eventually fight through them to find your invisible self.

## The Power of Your Invisible Self

Benjamin Franklin reminds us that “without continual growth and progress, such words as improvement, achievement, and success have no meaning.” This is an important reminder that the decision to grow and progress is what inevitably leads you to your invisible self. When I started to understand I was the one who needed to change, I realized there’s something within me that has all the power waiting to be discovered. It’s always here with me and ready to rise to the surface.

When I would close my eyes, I could see things I’ve never seen and experience feelings I’ve never felt. I felt the energy throughout my body. It started to move me forward. I became extremely curious. It dramatically changed my awareness to an indescribable level. I felt a sense of calm and ease. I constantly felt myself riding in a helicopter, overlooking my life and capturing an image of it from above. The journey was fascinating and unbelievably exciting. I started to be aware of everything around me and notice the true value of my being on this planet. I felt freedom and enormous power, which allowed me to fulfill my purpose and live in a life of my own destiny.

It helped me realize that many of us hold on to a poor self-image. We hear this little positive voice inside but choose not to listen to it. The truth is that your little inner voice has incredible power to control your mind and your path. I am sure that when we talk about self-image, people will say, “Yes, I am aware of that voice addressing my self-image. I just don’t listen to it.” Or they might say, “That voice limits me and makes me question my own path. I hear it, and I put way too much value into it.” People complain that they can’t do this and they can’t do that because they don’t have the money, the time, the education, the background, or the luck, and they are just not worth anything. It’s so easy to become one of them and believe those limiting statements.

I used to think people disliked me. When someone looked at me, I would be very uncomfortable and felt that person was saying to himself or herself, “Who do you think you are?” The real question should have been, “How much do I like myself?” It really doesn’t take much to destroy your confidence and join the majority of people who don’t like themselves. Everything we are looking for is staring us directly in the face. We just don’t always know how to ask the right questions. We let our ignorance kill our potential and stop us from growing into the people we want to become.

If you want to overcome obstacles, open your mind to continual practice and learn. A beautiful garden needs to be nourished by pulling weeds out, fertilizing the soil, and giving it plenty of water and sun. Our minds function the same way. Your old belief system has more power than you know. Mine kept me down year after year. Most of everything we do every day comes from our fundamental belief system. When you are ready to reveal the real you, you must have faith and discipline to overcome your old beliefs in order to live the life you want. It is an essential paradigm shift.

## You Are the Gift

Don't forget it. *Life* is a beautiful term for our journey on the planet. It is here for you to make it. Keep your mind wide open, and let the power in the universe guide you and offer you the support and insight you require. You are going to experience the power of creation through carefully using your mental intelligence to choose, decide, commit, focus, and, most importantly, follow by repetition until your secret gift comes to life. You and your divine operation can become one. Your faith will then connect you with the power in the universe. That will enable you to manifest all that you desire into your reality.

When I reference the notion of a "secret gift," I am referring to YOU. You are the only one with access to that one gift residing deep down inside of you. No one else can do the required work to unlock your gift. Success is no accident. It is intentional, thoughtful, and directed. Journeys begin with just one step, and there are no shortcuts along the way. This is the starting point for you. Whatever you want starts right here. You have to be willing to put everything from the past on the side so you can move forward with the real essence of you.

*Do you feel comfortable in doing what you know?*

*Could this help improve and maybe even change your life?*

*Are you ready to start your own journey to discovering and sharing your invisible self with the world?*

If so, read on.



## About the Author:



Joanna Durkin is the founder of American Study Program, a 501c (3) organization, and Academy of International Youth Education. She has mentored international students for over 20 years. As a result, not only the students achieve their educational goals, their parents will be learning how to grow with them together. Joanna was blessed with a passion and innate ability to improve every situation and make it better. She immigrated to America from Taiwan with her daughter Tina and is happily married to James Durkin and they live in California. If you would like to contact Joanna, email her at [info@secretgiftbook.com](mailto:info@secretgiftbook.com) .

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