

# Dear Awesome You!

A kind word. Sometimes that's all it takes to remind us that we really do have the strength to go on. Angela Joy Bailey believes that so much, she found her own joy by spreading words of encouragement to others . . .

On the brink of tears, Angela Joy Bailey swallowed hard.

A severe Type I diabetic since childhood, Joy—as her friends and family called her—had worked hard to earn her degree in child development from Texas Woman's University. And after graduation, she'd been excited to take a position at a preschool. But her diabetes made the hours and keep-

ing up with the children too exhausting.

So at 28, living with her parents in Grapevine, Texas, Joy now

worked as a receptionist. She liked her job. But some days, she felt so lost it was like being in third grade again, back when classmates teased and shunned her, not understanding why Joy needed insulin shots and was the only one allowed to have a morning snack.

This isn't how I hoped and dreamed my life would be! she sighed, sinking into anxiety and depression. *Something* has to change . . .

## Dear Awesome You . . .

Then one day Joy came across a book called *If You Find this Letter, by*

a young woman named Hannah Brencher who had cured her own loneliness after moving to New York City by leaving love letters for strangers to find.

Maybe I have to be kinder to myself, Joy had often thought, giving herself pep talks, even writing Post-It notes to stick on her mirror with positive reminders like *You are tough. Strong. Smart. Amazing.*

Now, inspired by that book and realizing that everybody could use more

words of thoughtfulness and compassion, Joy gathered some glitter pens and cheery stickers and began writing simple letters from the heart.

*Dear Awesome You!*

*Keep your dreams alive. Understand that to achieve anything requires faith and belief in yourself. And remember that all things are possible for those who believe!*

In another, she penned: *No matter our challenges or trials, there is something in each day to embrace and cherish!*

In the coming days, on a mission to put into words everything she longed to believe and wished someone would say to her, Joy began scarfing down her lunch, then spending the rest of her lunch hour

writing and decorating the notes and envelopes with stickers. And in the evenings, she'd write more letters, feeling a rush of love and optimism as she filled the pages with words of encouragement and motivational quotes.

Once Joy had a whole stack, she began delivering her love letters to nobody in particular.

*For You! Yes, You Who Is Reading This!* a pink envelope announced from a shelf in a grocery store or a counter in a public rest room.

*A Joy Letter for You!* others sang from hospital waiting rooms and benches on college campuses. Joy hoped they would touch someone's heart the way they had hers as she'd written them.

And, amazingly, Joy's letters were doing just that! Because although she didn't sign them, she'd included her e-mail address and soon realized that people were eager to contact her and thank her for providing words of comfort.

*You made me feel so much better about myself just when I needed it most,* one letter recipient wrote in gratitude. So soon, Joy found herself creating a website, Spread Joy 24/7 ([SpreadJoy24-7.com](http://SpreadJoy24-7.com)) where people could share their personal stories about how the messages touched them and spread their joy, too.



"I'm making the world a happier, more hopeful and joy-filled place, one letter at a time!" says Joy.

**"There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in."**

LEONARD COHEN

## Thank you for your kindness!

One woman who had recently been diagnosed with a chronic neurological disorder was feeling hopeless until she came across a Joy note in a bookstore.

*You reminded me of the smallest ways to find joy and happiness!* she wrote.

A mom who had just picked up her grown son after a stint in rehab found one of the mystery letters on a supermarket shelf.

*It was like God was winking at him and telling us that things would be okay. Thank you!* she posted on the website.

Another woman told Joy that she taped her note on her fridge so she could reread it every morning. A cancer patient insisted on delivering a tubful of cards to Joy to help further her project. And a group of friends in Michigan who heard about Spread Joy 24/7

held a letter-writing party, then delivered their own cheery notes all over town!

Week by week, as Joy focused on penning the perfect words to help struggling strangers, she realized she'd stumbled upon the secret to lifting her own spirits. Today, she's not only personally written and "delivered" more than 1,000 love letters, she even sends out a monthly inspirational newsletter encouraging others to start their own letter-writing projects!

"I've always wanted to help people. I feel like this is my way to give encouragement to others. And it helped me see my own life in a whole new light," explains Joy. "I'm literally living up to my name now! To be able to make someone smile is pretty awesome. Everyone deserves to hear kind things. And each of us has the power to brighten someone's day!"

—Marti Attoun



## How you can inspire others!

### Grab their attention!

"If you're leaving a note for a stranger, write 'Read me! Inspiration inside!' or 'Don't be shy! Open me!' on the front of the envelope," Joy says.

### Have fun spreading joy!

"I like to use bright ink and cute stickers," says Joy. And tuck in a surprise, too: "Sometimes I add little pens, inexpensive charm bracelets or small bottles of bubbles."

### Find the right words!

"I like to focus on hope and inner strength and beauty," Joy says. Go to [KeepInspiring.me](http://KeepInspiring.me) for quotes or check out "7 Days of Inspiration" on page 38.

Joy's letters help lift people's spirits—and with her tips, you can do the same!

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