

Beauty For Ashes
Refined in the Fire

By
Amy Bragdon

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Dedication

To every soul who crossed my path, whether for a moment, a chapter, or a lifetime, thank you.

Your presence, your absence, your love, your lessons, each became a spark in the fire that refined me.

Whether you offered joy or heartbreak, support or silence, you helped shape the woman I am today. Every encounter was part of the refining. I wouldn't rewrite a thing.

To those who now walk in Heaven but whose light still guides me:

To my Nan, the trailblazer, the wild soul, the nonconformist who danced through life with fearless laughter, you taught me to break the mold and follow the music only I could hear.

To my brother Alex, whose unwavering faith, kind heart, and joy live on in every story, every memory, and every redhead he left behind.

And to Sophia Chang, a quiet warrior of selfless friendship who stood beside me in my darkest hour, you reminded me what light looks like when everything else goes dim.

This book carries pieces of all of you, etched into the pages, refined in the fire, and rising still.

Acknowledgment

To my family, thank you for being the roots that ground me, the wind that lifts me, and the steady love that has carried me through fire and refinement.

To my mother and sister, Julie, your keen eyes, patient edits, and memory for the moments I nearly forgot helped shape these pages into something honest and whole. You reminded me of the laughter that carried us, even when life was heavy. Thank you for walking every word with me.

To my niece Riley, who not only helped with the editing but brought joy into the process with every laugh, late-night read-through, and reminder that storytelling is meant to be shared.

To my dad, the quiet encourager, thank you for your steady presence, your work-worn hands that have never stopped building, and your unwavering belief in me, even when I doubted myself.

To my Nan, the published author, the fire-starter of my creative soul. You taught me how to live unapologetically, love deeply, and write boldly. Your legacy is woven into every word I type.

To Richard, my brother who never backs down from a challenge. You've shown me what relentless faith looks like, how to keep dreaming, even when the dream gets heavy.

To Alex, whose faith never wavered and whose joy still echoes in every redhead he left behind. Your strength until the very end continues to light the way for mine.

To Angie, the mother of the Reds, thank you for continuing to love and be part of the Bragdon family through all of life's crazy ups and downs. Thank you for loving your girls to the moon and back, and for raising them with such strength and

grace. Their dad would be so proud of the beautiful young women they've become.

You've all helped refine me in your own way, through love, through loss, through laughter, through legacy. I carry you with me in every line.

With all my heart,

Amy

About the Author

Amy Bragdon was born and raised in a small rural community in New Brunswick, Canada, a place where faith was the compass, family was the foundation, and resilience was quietly forged in the everyday. Raised by a strong mother and a steady, silent father, Amy grew up in a home full of love, hard work, and just enough chaos to make it interesting.

Over the years, Amy has walked through fire, grief, heartbreak, burnout, and unimaginable loss, but she didn't just survive. She became. Her story is one of rising again and again, choosing faith over fear, purpose over perfection, and joy even in the ashes.

Today, Amy is a bestselling author, a top-producing realtor, a landlord and Airbnb hostess, a dedicated humanitarian, and a woman on a mission. She works with World Vision Canada, serves her community through philanthropy and mentorship, and continues to open her home, and heart, to those who need a place to land.

Whether she's writing her next book, serving on the Habitat for Humanity board, planning a missions initiative, or hosting guests at her Airbnb retreat, Amy leads with purpose and lives with passion.

She believes every scar tells a story, every fire refines, and that beauty always rises, especially from the ashes.

One of Amy's core beliefs is that failure is not the opposite of success, it's part of it.

Abraham Lincoln lost multiple elections before ever stepping into leadership.

Nelson Mandela spent 27 years in prison before becoming a president and global peacemaker.

Mother Teresa questioned her calling for years, even through incredible acts of service.

Each of them rose, not because the road was easy, but because they refused to give up.

So take the leap. Dare to fail. Get back up again. You only have one life, live it with purpose, with passion, and without apology.

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

—Philippians 4:13

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Refinement 1: The Beginning

“She was never meant to be consumed by the fire. She was meant to be refined in it.”

“But He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I will come forth as gold.”

From the outside, you might think you know me.

You'd see the curated photos, the polished home, the career wins, the smile that never quite gives it all away. You'd see strength, confidence, maybe even elegance.

But here's the truth: before there was any beauty, there were ashes.

And before the woman, there was the fire.

My name is Amy Bragdon, and this is not a story of perfection. It's a story of becoming. Not in spite of the fire, but because of it.

I was raised in a small rural town in New Brunswick, where faith was stitched into every Sunday morning and family meant everything. Life was humble, loud, and full. I grew up on hand-me-downs and home-cooked meals, surrounded by the scent of woodsmoke, fresh-cut grass, and my mother's perfume. My father's quiet strength anchored us; my mother's resilience lifted us.

By today's standards, I've built a beautiful life. A home I've renovated room by room, where every nail and paint stroke holds a piece of my healing. A career I'm proud of. A circle of family and friends who've weathered the storms with me. I drive a black Dodge Ram I named Black Beauty, a convertible that makes summer feel like freedom, and I live with two dogs, a bunny, a fish, and a country boy who holds my hand when it all feels like too much.

It's tempting to start the story here, in the glow of a life that looks put together. But that would be a lie. This isn't where it started. This is where the fire led me.

Before the home, there was heartbreak.

Before the career, there was collapse.

Before I was refined, I was reduced, burned to embers by loss, grief, betrayal, and the kind of pain that doesn't show up on your skin, but settles deep in your soul.

And yet, I'm still standing. Not just standing, rising.

Because somewhere between the falling apart and the putting back together, I discovered something sacred: that even in our most shattered moments, there is a kind of holy becoming. That sometimes the fire doesn't destroy, it reveals.

This book is not a fairy tale. It's a field guide for the brokenhearted.

It's a love letter to the woman who keeps showing up, to the mother, the caregiver, the dreamer, the fighter, the one who's had to carry more than her share and still finds a way to smile.

It's a testimony to the God who never wastes pain.

And a witness to the truth that every fire refines, if we let it.

So come close. Sit with me in the mess. Walk with me through the moments I thought would break me. Watch how, over time, something beautiful emerged.

This is where my story begins.

Not in the triumphs. But in the ashes.

The Siblings

Julie

Every story begins somewhere, and in the tapestry of my life, the first thread was my sister, Julie.

She came into the world first, and in many ways, she lit the path the rest of us would follow. Seven years older than me, she was my first idol, my first safe place, and my first glimpse of what grace under pressure looked like. To the world, she is quiet strength and deep compassion. But to me, she is the steady heartbeat of our family.

Even now, she doesn't quite see it, the beauty that radiates from her soul. It's the kind that isn't painted on or staged for the world. It's lived. It's refined. Like gold forged in heat, her gentleness has endured fire. And oh, how it glows.

Julie has always towed the family line with elegance. Like our mother, she fell in love young and married her high school sweetheart before twenty. She became a nurse, then later began pursuing her master's in counselling, because even her profession is an extension of who she is: someone who heals. Someone who helps.

She works full-time in public health, supports our brother's political campaigns behind the scenes, and somehow still makes time to serve as my administrative right hand at Bragdon Realty. But titles could never fully capture Julie. What makes her remarkable isn't her résumé, it's her heart. She gives without keeping score. Loves without hesitation. Shows up, even when no one else does.

During university, we shared a tiny apartment in downtown Fredericton, whispering our hopes into the night like sisters do. Later, I moved into her first home in Douglas, another chapter of late-night talks, mismatched furniture, and the soft comfort of shared life. Despite the years between us, our souls have always run parallel.

We've burned the midnight oil more times than I can count, carrying one another through heartbreak, uncertainty, and change. She is my voice of reason when I spin too fast, my anchor when the winds blow hard. I don't know who I would be without her.

One of my most treasured memories is our trip to New Orleans, a city as vibrant and unexpected as life itself. For Julie, it was her first time outside the small circles of home. To see her eyes widen with awe as jazz echoed through the French Quarter and the scent of gumbo danced through the streets, it was magic. But the real moment happened in an airport.

There, on a torn napkin between connecting flights, she made one of the most courageous decisions of her life. We had talked through her options, what to hold onto, what to let go of, and with pen in hand, she chose change. She chose herself. I've always believed that travel opens us. It strips away the noise and leaves only what's true. That trip became her turning point. And when our plane landed back in Canada, Julie stepped into a new chapter, refined by fire, but walking in freedom.

Julie has held my hand through my darkest days. She's been there in the sacred moments, when dreams were born, when hearts broke, when we didn't know how to go on, but somehow still did. She is my sister by blood, but my best friend by choice. And I thank God every day for the gift of her life intersecting mine.

She is also a mother, one of the best I've seen. Riley, her daughter, is cut from the same strong cloth. A paramedic by profession, a powerhouse by nature. Riley bought her first home at twenty-two and renovated her second at twenty-three. She's fiercely independent, yet tender where it counts. If she's not racing to save lives, she's curled up on my couch or soaking in my clawfoot tub, her second home, she says, where she doesn't need to ask permission. That's the kind of bond we share. That's the kind of family we are.

Mat, Julie's youngest, has just graduated high school and is already working alongside Ben in construction. He's grounded, dependable, and steady, the kind of young man who doesn't need to talk much to say a lot. His love runs deep, his loyalty even deeper.

Julie raised them both with quiet courage, often without recognition, always with love.

If life is a series of fires, my sister has walked through many. And each time, she's come out stronger, softer, and more radiant than before. She is a flame that never flickers, even in the wind.

She was my first light.

And to this day, she still is.



Alex

Alex was the second-born Bragdon, but in many ways, he was the spark that kept the rest of us warm.

He was never a bookworm or rule-follower, but he carried something even more rare: a boundless sense of joy. Alex had the kind of laugh that filled a room before he even spoke, and a presence that lifted everyone around him. Mischievous yet magnetic, grounded yet full of dreams, he was the kind of person you don't forget. He didn't just live life; he embraced it. Fully. Loudly. Lovingly.

From a young age, it was clear Alex wasn't built for mediocrity. He was strong-willed, wildly creative, and determined to carve out his own path. Whether it was fixing something with his bare hands, strumming a tune on the guitar, or cracking the perfect joke at just the right time, he did everything with heart. He may not have worn a cape, but to those who loved him, he was absolutely a hero.

And then came her, Angela. A sweet redhead from McAdam with a fire in her spirit that matched his own. One look was all it took. Alex was a goner. From that moment on, there was no turning back. Their love story wasn't drawn out or complicated. It was instant, electric, and undeniable. He knew she was the one.

Together, they built a life marked by laughter, loyalty, and legacy. Soon came their three daughters, Kaitlynn, Jessica, and Alexis, fiery redheads just like their mama and full of their daddy's spark. They were the light of Alex's life, the rhythm of his every breath. No man ever loved his girls more fiercely. He didn't just raise daughters; he raised warriors, each one a reflection of his joy, his resilience, and his heart.

In the community, Alex was known as the class clown and the guy who never showed up without a guitar or a good story. He had a joke for every situation and a heart big enough to carry the burdens of others. He wasn't a wealthy man, but what he gave couldn't be

measured in dollars, it was measured in loyalty, laughter, and love. In his later years, he poured himself into carpentry, launching a small business that blossomed into success, because everything he touched, he did with passion.

To me, he wasn't just my brother. He was a friend, a confidant, a bright light in the shadows. He taught me how to belly laugh, how to take risks, and how to never, ever, back down from a challenge. He was a man of faith and an eternal optimist, right until the end. And though he left us too soon, his legacy burns brightly in the lives of the three daughters he adored.



The Reds

Kaitlynn

Kaitlynn, the eldest, was born to lead. Driven, disciplined, and deeply grounded, she made her mark early on, excelling in school, dominating in sports, and eventually being crowned Miss Nackawic and then Miss New Brunswick. She chased her dreams through college and university, carving out a life in health care as a dedicated physiotherapy technician. She's strong, but she's soft too, and when she met Ben, a humble, hard-working carpenter from Harvey, it was as though her dad had sent him from above. Ben, in many ways, reminds me of Alex: quiet strength, calloused hands, and a heart of gold. The two married in a beautiful country ceremony, and now Ben builds homes... and the life Kait always dreamed of. Lucky for me, he also builds decks and dream rooms, I've hired him more times than I can count.

Jessica, the middle redhead, is my twin soul in a younger frame. She's wild and witty, the kind of person who makes you feel alive just by being near her. With the same mischievous sparkle in her eyes that her dad had, Jess is the heartbeat of our family. Her laugh is medicine. Her hugs are healing. We've shared countless nights curled into the vortex (our beloved name for my oversized sectional), talking about life, love, grief, and dreams. She's fiercely loyal, endlessly giving, and unapologetically her. A brilliant massage therapist by trade, Jess also lends her fire and finesse to Bragdon Realty, where she runs our PR and events like a seasoned pro. She's my go-to, my "yes girl," my therapy and thunderstorm in one.

And then there's **Alexis**, the baby. The last little red. She's a firecracker wrapped in sunshine, bold and bright with a heart the size of New Brunswick. Like her sisters, she was a star athlete in high school, and she's carried that same drive into her career in health care. Today, she's an LPN at the DECH, serving others with

empathy and energy, just like her dad would have. But Lex isn't just a caregiver, she's a vibe. She lights up a room, sparkles when she smiles, and leaves you better than she found you. She recently bought a home with her high school sweetheart, Andy, and together they're expecting their first child, Alex's first grandbaby. A part of me still can't believe it. How did we get here? I often joke that I'm far too young to be "great" at anything, so I'll just be Taunty. It sounds cuter, anyway.

But no matter how much time passes, when I look at these three girls, I still see the little redheads racing around the living room, giggling in their princess dresses. And I know, deep in my heart, that their daddy is smiling from heaven, beaming with pride.

Angela, thank you. For never leaving our family's side. For loving Alex with your whole heart. For raising your daughters with strength and gentleness, and for continuing to walk with us through life's wild twists and turns. You are forever part of the Bragdon story.

Alex's chapter may have ended on earth, but his story is still being written, through every laugh, every hard-earned dream, and every memory etched into the hearts of the people who loved him. He was refined in the fire, and so are his girls.

Fly high, my brother.

Your fire still burns.



Richard

Some people are born to entertain. Some are born to fight. My brother Richard? He was born to preach.

Long before he ever held a microphone or stood behind a pulpit, he was already delivering backyard sermons from the pulpit of a tree stump in our childhood woods, Bible clutched tightly in his chubby hands, squirrels and birds his captive congregation. “I preach the biyi!” he would shout with conviction, mispronouncing “Bible” with adorable confidence. He was barely out of toddlerhood, still fumbling with words and battling a childhood hearing impairment, but oh, did he preach.

You could already see it, this spark in him that wouldn’t be silenced.

As we grew up, Rich was the “straight and narrow” sibling. The kind of kid who worried about rules, order, and cleaning the four-wheeler after accidentally hitting a mud puddle. If I was the fire, he was the compass. Focused, disciplined, devoted to God. His high school years were filled with all the hallmarks of a rising leader: debate team, hockey, Christian clubs, he walked the walk.

After high school, his calling led him to Bible college, where he immersed himself in theology, faith, and servant leadership. It wasn’t long before he was ordained and serving as Associate Pastor at one of Fredericton’s largest churches, Sunset Church now known as Hope City. For seventeen years, he poured himself into ministry, walking alongside people in their highest highs and lowest lows. He married, raised children, and preached hope into broken hearts. But the call to serve didn’t stop at the altar.

It grew louder. Bolder.

After nearly two decades in traditional ministry, Richard felt God leading him into new territory. He ventured into prison ministry, agricultural management, real estate, and eventually, politics. Because at his core, Rich is a bridge-builder. A big-picture thinker with a heart for the overlooked. He saw injustice and wanted to

change it. He heard the voices of his community and longed to amplify them.

His first run for Parliament was noble and exhausting, endless unpaid hours knocking on doors, listening to stories, hearing people's struggles and dreams. He gave it everything. And when the votes were counted, it wasn't enough.

Most people would've folded. But not Rich.

He dusted off the disappointment, dug deeper into prayer, and knocked on even more doors. He didn't just show up; he stayed, at meetings, in parades, at community BBQs and late-night phone calls with constituents. He didn't campaign for power. He ran for people. And this time, the door swung open.

Today, my brother is the proud MP for Tobique–Mactaquac. But that title doesn't define him. It's just one of many roles he's filled on this winding road of purpose.

He's still the preacher on the stump.

Still the kid with a Bible and a dream.

Still the man who believes in second chances, mountain-moving faith, and the power of showing up even when you're weary.

He has a few catchphrases that float through our family gatherings like sacred mantras:

“Fine as frog's hair.”

“Split one million different ways.”

“All things keep rolling.”

They make us laugh, but they're more than words. They're reflections of a man who has lived through deserts and floods, success and sorrow, and always emerged stronger. Richard has had moments where even his steady faith has been shaken, where the silence of heaven seemed too loud to bear. But he always returned

to the Word. Always found hope again. Always rose, refined in the fire.

He's not just my brother. He's a symbol of perseverance. A husband, father, dreamer, and doer. A preacher turned politician, still guided by the same voice that called to him all those years ago in the woods.

And every time he stands up in Parliament, I smile, because I know somewhere deep down, he's still just that barefoot boy with the "biyi," preaching to the trees.

The secret to success? It's not found in some slick seminar or flashy promise of overnight wealth. No, the real secret, the one too few talk about, is forged in the quiet, unseen spaces: the long days, the harder nights, the unwavering belief that your labour is not in vain. The truth is this: success comes from relentless work and even greater faith. You will fall. You will face closed doors, criticism, and loss. But it's what you do next that defines you.

The hero isn't the one who never stumbles, it's the one who refuses to stay down.

That is how character is carved. That is how strength is shaped. That is how the fire refines.

I am proud to come from a family with deep roots of grit, unwavering faith, and resilience that doesn't back down. We were never handed greatness, but we were handed a legacy. And Richard? He's carried it with honour.

Now serving his second term as a Member of Parliament, Richard has not only realized some of his lifelong dreams, he's exceeded them. But even in the spotlight, it's the shadows that shaped him. In his toughest seasons, when the weight of responsibility threatened to crush the calling, Richard found himself drawn to the powerful sermons of A southern TV Avangelist and Best Selling Author, his voice carried fire and truth, speaking into the dry bones of hardship, reminding him that grace can carry what human strength alone cannot.

And then something extraordinary happened.

Richard began to harness all the experiences that had refined him, his church upbringing, his years in pastoral care, and his deep compassion for the forgotten, and turned it into policy. He drafted a bill to reduce recidivism, built not just on numbers and data, but on dignity. The vision? Equip inmates with skills, education, and support so they wouldn't just leave prison, they'd rise from it.

Through prayer, perseverance, and providence, that bill made its way to Parliament. But what followed could only be described as divine alignment.

Richard joined forces with the very man whose voice had spoken life over him during his lowest moments. Together, they began to shape something that would go beyond Canada's borders, something that would truly transform lives.

And then came the garden party.

As Bill C228 was nearing its final passage into Canadian law, Richard received an invitation to attend an intimate gathering hosted by the Bishop at his personal residence. There, surrounded by global influencers, artists, and visionaries, my brother stood shoulder to shoulder with the very people who had once seemed unreachable.

But he wasn't there as a fan.

He was there as an equal.

That surreal night wasn't about fame, it was about faithfulness. It was proof that when God opens a door, no man can close it.

Richard has always lived what he preached, that if you cling to faith and rise with resolve, all things truly are possible. Even in the fire. Especially in the fire.

He met his beautiful bride, Crystal, young and full of purpose. Like Julie and Alex, they married early and built a life anchored in faith.

Together, they're raising three incredible children who are writing the next chapter of this legacy:

Vada, the firstborn, mirrors her father's strength and sense of right and wrong. She's deeply rooted in her faith, fiercely loyal to what's good, and often found declaring, "That's very inappropriate," in the most adorably righteous tone.

Walker, the middle child, is now in high school—a brilliant blend of intellect, discipline, and quiet faith. He's thriving on the football field, and we're already keeping an eye on the bleachers for admirers.

And then there's **Mariah**—the baby, the final grandchild, the *Princess*. Mariah doesn't just light up a room—she *owns* it. Her love of animals, fidget toys, and heartfelt conversation makes her unforgettable. She'll charm the socks off a stranger and outtalk a donkey without missing a beat.

Their home is filled with laughter, purpose, and the kind of legacy that comes not from perfection, but from perseverance.

Richard's story reminds us that Beauty for Ashes is not just a promise, it's a process. And when you let the fire refine instead of consume, the ashes can become the very soil where destiny is born.



Amy

Then there was me, the baby of the bunch.

Picture it: blonde curls, dimpled cheeks, full of sass and sparkle. I was the kind of child who didn't just walk into a room, I entered it, ready to steal the spotlight and charm the crowd. But with three older siblings, each already staking their claim on some corner of greatness, carving out space was no easy task. My sister? She had all the boys wrapped around her finger. My older brother? The girls couldn't look away. And the preacher boy? He was busy racking up trophies and accolades before I even knew how to spell the word.

So where did that leave me?

Smack dab in the middle of the stage, of course.

If there was music, I was dancing. If there was a mic, I was singing. If there was an audience, even if it was just two sleepy parents at the end of a long day, I was performing. Drama teams, choirs, church plays, school productions, they were my playground. I started writing songs before I could properly structure sentences, and something in me just knew I was made to create, to express, to shine.

But no matter how bright I sparkled, there was one truth I couldn't outrun, society's cruel measuring stick.

I wasn't a size two. I never fit the narrow, airbrushed image that culture deemed "beautiful." And even though I had a kind heart, a quick wit, and a face that glowed with joy, I was often made to feel like I wasn't enough. Growing up in that era meant no "body positivity" movements or "safe spaces." Bullying was very real, and most of us were told to toughen up and move on.

And I did.

But I didn't just toughen up, I grew up. And in the process, I built something more enduring than a flawless figure: resilience, self-worth, and soul-deep confidence.

Over time, I coined a few mantras that became both battle cries and lifelines:

- “Girl, I am curvaceous and voluptuous.”
- “God doesn’t make mistakes, I am divinely designed.”

At first, I spoke them to remind myself. Later, I whispered them to my nieces as they entered that tender, self-critical stage of adolescence. Now? I hear them repeating those very same words to each other, like a legacy of love echoing through generations.

If my journey gave them the courage to stand tall, to love who they are, and to know their worth, then every scar was worth it. Every eye-roll I ignored, every comment I rose above, every outfit I wore with shaky confidence until it became bold defiance of the norm... it was all part of becoming.

Refined in the fire.

And more than enough.



.....You have reached the end of this sample preview.

The fire was never the end of the story...

it was the beginning of becoming.

Some stories entertain you. Others awaken something inside you.

If this short sample from *Beauty for Ashes* spoke to your heart,
click the link above to continue the journey. The next chapter is
waiting for you.

Refined. Becoming. Appointed. Commissioned.