

I'm going to tell you something about my life my name is Elizabeth Fry I was born in 1780 in Norfolk I will begin the story I will tell you when I was just a child so you can see where I started from and what I became we were a large family I had six brothers and sisters but I always seemed to be the odd one out while my siblings all played together and were loud and run around the house I always felt like I couldn't keep up and I couldn't fit in we lived in a big old house I was afraid of the dark and sometimes my brothers and sisters would tease me and make me go into it's dark corners knowing I'd be scared my fear of the dark was even worse at night we only had candle light then and I'd lie awake watching it burn down dreading the moment it would go out nearly every night I dreamt the sea was coming to wash me away I grew up but still it was the same still I stared at the candle till it went out and woke from dreams that the sea was coming to wash me away I was a timid person afraid to join in I was never quite sure who I was or what I was supposed to do with my life my family were Quakers a religion that taught us we should do what we could to help the poor we had plenty of money and I felt uneasy about the comfortable life we lived whilst others around us struggled to get by I tried to help I collected clothes for them or gave them money or food but I knew that handing out apples or pennies wasn't nearly enough one Sunday we went to the meeting house like we always did at Quaker meetings there would be no priest or vicar to lead the service and

mostly we would just sit together in  
silent prayer  
anyone was free to speak if they felt  
moved to do so  
a man called William savoury a Quaker  
from America had come to sit with us  
when he stood to speak everyone listened  
suddenly something he said made me  
listen really listen like it had  
woken me up  
I say again take the life you have been given  
And do good with it  
I never knew that one man's words could  
change your life  
I can't explain what happened it was  
like a great weight was lifted from me I  
felt light as a feather light inside it  
was like I'd spent all my life up to  
this point underwater and finally I'd swum  
up to the surface and could breathe and  
in that moment what you might call my  
Epiphany  
I saw what it was I had to do I'd always  
wanted to do good but I saw for the  
first time that it should be my sole  
purpose and rather than waiting for  
something to happen like I had done all  
these years I had to act it was up to me  
I'd heard about Newgate Prison but it  
was one of the darkest most awful places  
you could imagine I felt compelled to  
visit it and see the terrible conditions  
for myself it was the largest prison in  
London and full to the rafters with both  
the worst kind of criminals and with  
people who were put there for the  
smallest crimes it had a reputation for  
being a terrible place for a person to  
end up  
even the building itself had been  
designed to instill fear in all those  
who looked upon it people tried to put  
me off saying it was no place for a lady  
like me but I needed to see it for

myself to think I had been afraid to lie  
down in my own bed at night and here was  
I about to walk down the long dark  
corridors of Newgate  
but I was no longer afraid I would never  
fear the dark again all the fear had  
gone out of me and I was focused only on  
the work that I would do  
what a place it was all heavy gates and  
thick walls without windows it was a  
one-day any soul who dwelt and it could  
breathe at all  
when I saw the conditions the prisoners  
were kept in I was appalled treated worse  
than animals they were all herded  
together in one room they had no privacy  
just a bucket and nowhere to wash  
themselves or clean their clothes  
there were women too amongst the men most of  
them out of petty crimes like stealing  
clothes or loaves of bread  
but the worst sight of all was the sight  
of their poor children innocent of any  
crime forced to suffer just the same  
I hurried away knowing that I had found  
my purpose there was so much work to be  
done  
the people I had seen at Newgate Prison  
especially the children were like  
forgotten Souls like little ships lost  
at sea I would make it my job to light  
their way back to shore to show them all  
was not lost  
first I would see to it they got the  
most basic things I gathered friends  
together and we sew clothes for the  
children  
the very next day I returned to Newgate  
Prison  
I brought the clothes we've made and  
fresh bread which they ate like they're  
not seen bread before  
but what I really wanted was to do  
something for the children

I clicked up a boy who could not have  
been more than four years old I made  
them listen

I said should we not do something for  
these children who are innocent of any  
crime should the children not have a  
chance even if their mothers did not I  
said we could give them that chance a  
chance of a future beyond you gates  
walls and to give them that chance we  
should give them schooling I said I  
would teach them myself and they agreed  
I had benches brought in and books soon  
I had them all lined up and listening as  
I read aloud but the children were the  
only ones this thing all the better I  
thought if the women too had the desire  
to learn I suspect most to never have  
the chance before

I decided I would teach them too but  
they might find work on leaving prison  
and not need to resort to petty crime  
again

nothing the schooling was a great  
success words got around apparently the  
prisoners had never been so quiet so  
orderly so willing to get on

[Music]

when the Mayor of London himself came to  
see what we were doing I knew now that  
everyone was listening and that this was  
just the beginning with his approval  
there would be even more we could  
achieve or had started with the words of  
the preacher William savory had become  
my whole life my entire purpose all my  
fear had gone I knew at last exactly who  
I was I took the life I had been given  
and did good with it

the work I did went on to change every  
prison in the country and the poor who  
ended up there would no longer be  
forgotten instead they would be given  
the chance of a better life

you