



# Brightening the Corners

*Rays of Hope for Our World*

**MARY C. WOOLLING**



*Here's to Life!*<sup>™</sup>

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The background is a solid, bright pink. It is decorated with numerous white stars of various sizes and shapes, some with multiple points. Several thin, white, curved lines sweep across the page, creating a sense of motion and elegance. The overall aesthetic is clean, modern, and celebratory.

*Bright  
Outlook*

# Brightening the Corners

*Do not wait until some deed of greatness you may do,  
Do not wait to shed your light afar;  
To the many duties ever near you now be true,  
Brighten the corner where you are.  
Just above are clouded skies that you may help to clear,  
Let not narrow self your way debar;  
Though into one heart alone may fall your song of cheer,  
Brighten the corner where you are.<sup>2</sup>*  
- Ina Duley Ogdon, American poet and hymn writer

**O**f the many well-known hymns by Ina Duley Ogdon (1872-1964), the most famous, *Brighten the Corner Where You Are*, came about as a result of Ina's making the best of things when life presented her with the bitter reversal of a dream.

In 1912, Ina, a school teacher and inspirational song writer, was invited to speak at a Chautauqua meeting. Chautauqua meetings were part of a popular nationwide Christian revival movement begun in 1874 near Lake Chautauqua in western New York state. The uplifting Chautauqua programs, lasting from three to seven days, were designed to enrich all ages. They featured a variety of stage plays and musical performances by famous stars, as well as enlivening sermons and political and social messages from outstanding preachers and

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2 *Brighten the Corner Where You Are*, Ina Duley Ogdon, 1913.

orators. Chautauqua gatherings took place during the summertime and attracted huge numbers of people.

To be a part of one of these programs must have been a great thrill for Ina, who, by all accounts, was delighted with the prospect of presenting her personal message of hope to such a large audience. Shortly before she was to leave for the Chautauqua meeting, however, Ina's father became seriously ill. She immediately cancelled her trip to stay home and take care of him.

At first, Ina was greatly downhearted to miss what she saw as an opportunity of a lifetime to make a difference for good, but she came to realize that such an opportunity is not dependent upon the quantity of people one helps nor the size of the arena in which one operates. Though she gave up her goal of touching the lives of many, Ina discovered deep personal satisfaction in knowing she had made a difference in the life of one person – her beloved father in his final days.

The next year, Ina wrote her famous poem *Brighten the Corner Where You Are*. Ironically, through her words (excerpted above), she ultimately reached more individuals with her positive philosophy of life than she ever could have at that one revival meeting. That same year, composer Charles H. Gabriel wrote a melody to accompany her poem.

The resulting hymn was then chosen by Homer Rodeheaver, colleague of famous baseball evangelist Billy Sunday, to be the official song for Mr. Sunday's revival meetings. Subsequently, it was recorded by many famous singers and was even printed in Braille, eventually becoming one of the most popular hymns ever written.

Closer to home, beginning from the time I was very young, my mother often quoted *Brighten the Corner* to me. The hymn captured one of her guiding principles, encapsulating her philosophy of life. For my father, brother, and me, Mom was, and always will be, the bright light in all the corners of our lives.

We don't have to travel the globe or speak to multitudes in order to impact others in a positive way. We can all make the world a better place if we simply brighten the corners where we are.

*With loving memories and bright thoughts of you, Mom, always.*

