

Blessed Assurance

The Fanny Crosby Story

By Gloria Emmerich

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

Female:

FANNY CROSBY (age 86 - widowed)

FANNY DOANE (age 74 - married to William Doane)

FANNY SANKEY (age 67 - married to Ira D. Sankey)

NATALIE "NATTY" TAIT (age flexible - original production portrayed her as 11 - great niece to Fanny Crosby...Fanny's brother's daughter's daughter.)

Male:

WILLIAM DOANE (age 74 - hymnist - married to Fanny Doane)

IRA D. SANKEY (age 66 - gospel singer and hymnist - married to Fanny Sankey)

ACT ONE (Song Assignments):

1. BLESSED ASSURANCE (Crosby/Knapp) COMPANY
2. REDEEMED (Crosby/Kirkpatrick)..... COMPANY
3. HE HIDETH MY SOUL (Crosby/Kirkpatrick) TRIO: IRA, MRS. SANKEY, FANNY
4. ALL THE WAY MY SAVIOR LEADS ME (Crosby/Lowry)..... MRS. D & COMPANY
5. JESUS IS TENDERLY CALLING YOU HOME (Crosby/Stebbins)..... COMPANY
6. SAVED BY GRACE (Crosby/Stebbins)..... COMPANY
7. PRAISE HIM, PRAISE HIM! (Crosby/Allen) COMPANY

ACT TWO:

8. BLESSED ASSURANCE (*Reprise*) (Crosby/Knapp) COMPANY
9. TELL ME THE STORY OF JESUS (Crosby/Sweney) COMPANY
10. MY SAVIOR FIRST OF ALL (Crosby/Sweney) COMPANY
11. I AM THINE, O LORD (Crosby/Doane) COMPANY
12. SAFE IN THE ARMS OF JESUS (Crosby/Doane) COMPANY
13. RESCUE THE PERISHING (Crosby/Doane) COMPANY
14. NEAR THE CROSS (Crosby/Doane)..... COMPANY
15. PASS ME NOT, O GENTLE SAVIOR (Crosby/Doane) COMPANY
16. TO GOD BE THE GLORY (Crosby/Doane)..... COMPANY

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ACT ONE SC 1:

Set in the summer of 1906 in Bridgeport, CT. FANNY is 86. Her great niece NATTY is 10 (age is flexible). The song intro starts in the dark; then lights come up slowly. Cast is assembled on SL like an ensemble, in front of a stained glass window. FANNY and NATTY are hidden in the back row, until the ensemble parts to reveal them at the end of the song. They then step forward and move DSR toward rocking chair. Ensemble exits SL at the end of the opening number.

SONG # 1 – Blessed Assurance (3:12)

ALL: This is my story, this is my song...praising my Savior all the day long.
This is my story, this is my song...praising my Savior all the day long.
Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God, born of the Spirit, washed in His blood.

This is my story; this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long.
This is my story; this is my song, praising my Savior all the day.
This is my story; this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long.
This is my story; this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long.
Praising my Savior all the day long. Praising my Savior all the day long.

FANNY: All right, Natalie; you got me out here; now, what would you like to do? We've got *all day* together while your parents are away. What's your pleasure, dear?

NATTY: Aunt Fanny, (1800s "New England style" pronunciation of Aunt [Awnt]) I told you not to call me that! Call me Natty. *Natalie* sounds like an old lady name! (Realizes what she's said.) OH! Not that being an old lady like you is a horrible thing...I mean, not that *you're* old...it's just that it sounds so *frumpy*...I mean...not that *you're* frumpy...I mean...

FANNY: I think you'd better stop...before you choke on that foot you've got stuck in your mouth. I understand what you're trying to say...from now on I will call you Natty. I didn't much like being called Frances when I was your age either...I always preferred Fanny. I always thought Frances sounded like a mean ol' schoolteacher...or a grumpy old spinster!

NATTY: (Giggles.) Mean? Oh, Aunt Fanny...*you* couldn't be mean if you tried!

FANNY: Well, I could so too...if I wasn't blind! Then I could see your backside and give you a swat or two! *(They both laugh.)* Now, answer my question...Miss Natty! What would you like to do today?

NATTY: *(Practically pouncing into FANNY'S lap.)* Stories! Tell me stories about when you were a little girl! You promised you'd tell me some day and today is as good as any!

FANNY: Oh! *Stories?!* I'd have thought you'd want to go horseback riding, or swimming, or climb trees! Well, thank the good Lord for that! I think I can handle storytelling much better. All right then Miss Natty Tait; ask me a question and I'll do my best to give you a short and simple answer...*but*, I make no promises about the "short and simple" part!

NATTY: Great! *(Thinks a moment then blurts out a question.)* Where were you born!

FANNY: *Good night* in the morning! You're going to make me start way back there?! Why, we'll be out here till the moon grows a beard! *(NATTY giggles and pleads with her.)* All right...all right. Never thought I'd torture my own kin...but, here goes. I was born in a small town called Southeast in New York.

NATTY: Is that far from here?

FANNY: No...not with travel today. Just 45 miles from Bridgeport. Of course when I was little that was a very long ride!

NATTY: Aunt Fanny...are you sorry that you've been blind your whole life...?

FANNY: *Sorry?!* Why, of course not! It was intended by the blessed providence of God that I should be blind all my life, and I thank Him for the privilege. If perfect earthly sight were offered me tomorrow I would not accept it. Natty dear...I might not have sung hymns to the praise of God if I had been distracted by the beautiful and interesting things around me.

NATTY: Then you were born blind?

FANNY: No. It was at the age of 6 weeks that I contracted a cold that caused inflammation in my eyes. Our regular doctor was away so my parents had a roaming doctor come out to see me...someone they did not know. He suggested hot poultices be put on my eyes, which ultimately destroyed my sight.

NATTY: Poultice? What's a poultice?

FANNY: Well, it's a sort of salve that is used on an infected or inflamed area to relieve the inflammation...but in this case...it just wasn't the right thing to do.

NATTY: So it was the doctor's fault that you went blind?! Well I hope he was punished for ruining your eye sight!

FANNY: Natalie Catherine Tait! I have *never* blamed that poor doctor for losing my eye sight! It wasn't his fault. When word of my misfortune spread throughout the neighborhood the poor man thought it best to leave the area... and I've never heard of him since. This was God's will for my life, Natty. What was meant for evil, God turned it around and used it for good!

NATTY: I'm sorry, Aunt Fanny...I guess God knows best what we need.

FANNY: He most certainly does.

NATTY: Then when did you start writing hymns, and stories...and poems?

FANNY: Well, first of all you said those all in the wrong order. I wrote my first poem when I was but eight years old. People were always feeling sorry for the poor little blind girl. But those who knew me best around town knew there was nothing that stopped little Fanny from doing everything that the other kids did! Why I could ride a horse bare back, climb trees, and swim in the river as well as anyone else! In fact the neighbors always said I was "well acquainted with mischief!"

NATTY: What was your first poem? Do you remember it? How'd you write it down?

FANNY: Hold your horses, Natty! I only have one mouth with which to answer and I'm sure many are thanking God for that! My memory has always been quite keen, you know. Why, I used to sit just where you are right now at the foot of my grandmother as she sat in this very rocker. It was she that taught me to pray and commit to memory scripture after scripture; God bless her for that! It wasn't until later that my poems and stories and hymns were written down by my husband, or sister, or later by my secretary. And yes, of course, I still remember that little poem!

NATTY: Then say it now, Aunt Fanny! I want to hear it!

FANNY: All right...but when I've finished you'll thank God it was short! *(Clears throat.)*

Oh, what a happy soul I am, although I cannot see,
I am resolved that in this world contented I will be.
How many blessings I enjoy that other people don't!
To weep and sigh because I'm blind, I cannot nor I won't!

NATTY: *(Applauds.)* You wrote that when you were just a few years younger than I am now!

FANNY: Well, I don't expect to get any awards for that one, to be sure! But, it was a start for hopefully better things to come.

IRA: *(Enters with MRS. SANKEY. IRA is now nearly blind from glaucoma.)* I should have known you'd be out here telling stories, Miss Fanny! Even if you only have an audience of one!

MRS.SNK: Ira Sankey, mind your manners! *(Leans down to kiss FANNY.)* Sorry, Fanny. He's decided to try and be witty in his old age!

FANNY: Well, perhaps now that he's joined the ranks of the blind, he can get down to business and write some music that will stagger the very host of Heaven!

IRA: If I have my favorite blind hymnist by my side I'm sure we can come up with something that will stir even the youngest heart! *(Pats NATTY on the head.)*

FANNY: Natalie, this is Mr. and Mrs. Sankey, dear friends of mine. We've worked together writing hymns for many years now. This is my niece's daughter...and you are *not* to call her anything but Natty because Natalie is an old lady name!

NATTY: (*Embarrassed.*) Aunt Fanny...! (*The adults chuckle.*)

MRS.SNK: Forgive us, Natty. We didn't mean to interrupt.

NATTY: That's all right. Aunt Fanny was just telling me stories of when she was growing up, and things she's done.

IRA: Has she told you of all the hymns and poems she's written...how many is it now, Fanny? Eight...or is it nine thousand? I'm glad the Biglow and Main Company kept track for you. (*Picks up a hymnal from a stack on the table; thumbs through it.*)

MRS.SNK: Even if they did insist you use *noms de plume* because you were writing so many hymns they thought they'd better not have your name on all of them! Silly men! (*She too picks up a hymnal from the table and rifles through it.*)

IRA: Yes, how many different names did they give you, Fanny? Nearly two hundred I think! And half of them men! (*Laughs.*) Frank Gould, Robert Bruce, James L. Black, ah...Henrietta E. Blair...now I like that one! Has a nice poetical ring to it!

NATTY: They used somebody else's name on your hymns? That's not fair.

FANNY: They were made up names, Natty. They just didn't want to wear out *my* name.

IRA: Your great Aunt Fanny was quite a prolific writer...and still is, no doubt!

FANNY: Since you're here, Ira, perhaps you can help me answer the multitude of questions my young interviewer has for me. God knows my mind is traveling the way of my eyes... fading as the years go by, I'm afraid. So help me out, Ira; you too, Fanny.

IRA: Ah! Why yes, of course.

NATTY: (*Gives her Aunt FANNY a funny look.*) You're both named Fanny?

MRS.SNK: That's right, Natty. Frances was a very popular name in our day.

FANNY: Your mother's middle name is Frances, as well...your grandma named her after me she said.

IRA: All right Natty. I'll be happy to answer any questions you have about your great aunt. I don't promise to know everything, but I *do* know just about all there is to know regarding her hymns. There are so many wonderful hymns still being sung today that were written by your great aunt.

NATTY: Really? Like what? Do I know any of them? Do we sing them in our church?

FANNY: See what I mean...? (*Indicates to IRA to answer NATTY.*)

IRA: Why, I should hope you do! Fanny! Haven't you taught this girl your hymns?

MRS.SNK: Ira, you said yourself there are thousands! And we both know Fanny well enough to know she would *never* "announce" to others, even her kinfolk, that she wrote a hymn they happened to be singing in church on Sunday morning!

FANNY: Thank you, Fanny! Well put!

IRA: Well, yes...yes. Of course not. Let's just select a few of my favorites...and none of these are any that I had a hand in, to be sure! But first, a little gift, Fanny. A Braille hymnal! Now you can sing every verse to every hymn!

FANNY: Why, thank you, Ira. So very thoughtful of you. *(She fingers through hymnal.)*

MRS.SNK: *(To FANNY.)* He doesn't know it yet but I've ordered one for Ira as well, Fanny.

IRA: So, let us start with William Kirkpatrick. You wrote quite a few with him.

FANNY: Yes, Kirkie, I called him...much to his annoyance.

IRA: *(Laughs.)* Ah, yes...Kirkie! I know that only *you* got away with that, Fanny. I called him Kirkie once and the look he gave me told me I wouldn't *dare* ever do it again! *(They all laugh.)* But, the man could write a tune, that's for sure. One of my favorites was "Redeemed." It had such a nice...bounce to it, don't you think? I remember the first time I heard it. Do you?

FANNY: As if it were yesterday. *(MRS. SANKEY begins the solo and the others join in.)*

SONG # 2 - REDEEMED (3:00 approx.)

Verse 1 MRS. SANKEY: Redeemed, how I love to proclaim it; redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.
Redeemed through His infinite mercy; His child, and forever, I am.

ALL: Redeemed, redeemed; redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.
Redeemed, redeemed; His child, and forever, I am.

Verse 3 ALL: I think of my blessed Redeemer, I think of Him all the day long.
I sing, for I cannot be silent; His love is the theme of my song.
Redeemed, redeemed; redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

Verse 4 ALL: Redeemed, redeemed; His child, and forever, I am. *(Key change Eb to E.)*

Verse 4 I know I shall see in His beauty the King in whose law I delight.
Who lovingly guardeth my footsteps and giveth me songs in the night.
Redeemed, redeemed; redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.
Redeemed, redeemed; His child, and forever, I am.
Redeemed, redeemed; redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.
Redeemed, redeemed; His child, and forever, I am.

MRS.SNK: I think your most recent one with Kirkpatrick is one of *my* favorites. Of course, it was still nearly 20 years ago now. My, the time does fly. And our own church choir sang it just last Sunday. "He Hideth My Soul." They sang it beautifully, Fanny.

SONG # 3 - HE HIDETH MY SOUL TRIO (3:45)

IRA, MRS. SANKEY, FANNY

IRA: A wonderful Savior is Jesus, my Lord; a wonderful Savior to me.
He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock, where rivers of pleasure I see.
He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock that shadows a dry, thirsty land.
He hideth my life in the depths of His love, and covers me there with His hand;
And covers me there with His hand.

Verse 2 TRIO: A wonderful Savior is Jesus, my Lord; He taketh my burden away.
He holdeth me up and I shall not be moved;
He giveth me strength as my day. *(Key change.)*

Verse 4 TRIO: When clothed in His brightness, transported I rise,
To meet Him in clouds of the sky. His perfect salvation, His wonderful love,

I'll shout with the millions on high! _____
He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock that shadows a dry, thirsty land.
He hideth my life in the depths of His love, and covers me there with His hand;
And covers me there with His hand.

IRA: And covers me there with His hand. _____

NATTY: Beautiful! That sounded familiar! Aunt Fanny, you must be famous!

IRA: *(Before FANNY can respond.)* She is, Natty! She is! Why, there isn't a good Christian man or woman in this whole country that wouldn't know Fanny's name or one of her hymns. Isn't that true, my dear?

FANNY: *(Before his wife can answer; she turns to MRS. SANKEY.)* Evangelastically speaking... *(Both ladies laugh.)*

IRA: *(Excited.)* Oh! Here's another great hymn, Natty. "All the Way My Savior Leads Me." The Reverend Robert Lowry wrote the music for this one.

MRS.SNK: Good heavens, Ira. That goes back nearly 35 years!

FANNY: And I remember exactly how I wrote it. I believe it was 1875 and I was struggling financially. I desperately needed some money. Of course as was my usual custom, I bowed my head and began to pray. A few minutes later a man walked up to me and offered me five dollars...the exact amount that I needed! *(Chuckles.)* I believe God put it into the heart of this good man to bring me the money. After thanking God I sat right down and wrote the words, "All the Way My Savior Leads Me."

MRS.SNK: He certainly does, Fanny...He certainly does. *(The DOANES enter during intro; MRS. DOANE sings a solo. FANNY is overwhelmed as she recognizes her voice.)*

SONG # 4 - ALL THE WAY MY SAVIOR LEADS ME (4:58)

MRS.D: All the way my Savior leads me; what have I to ask beside?
Can I doubt His tender mercy, who through life has been my guide?
Heavenly peace, divinist comfort, here by faith in Him to dwell!
For I know, whate'er befall me, Jesus doeth all things well.
For I know, whate'er befall me, Jesus doeth all things well. *(Key Change.)*

ALL: All the way my Savior leads me; cheers each winding path I tread.
Gives me grace for every trial, feeds me with the living bread.
Though my weary steps may falter, and my soul athirst may be;
Gushing from the rock before me; Lo! A spring of joy I see.
Gushing from the rock before me; Lo! A spring of joy I see. _____ *(Key Change.)*

ALL: All the way my Savior leads me; O the fullness of His love!
Perfect rest to me is promised in my Father's house above. *(Key Change.)*
When my spirit, clothed immortal, wings its flight to realms of day,
This my song through endless ages, Jesus led me all the way.
This my song through endless ages, Jesus led me all the way. _____

MRS.D: Jesus leads me all the way; this is the song I sing.
Jesus leads me all the way. _____

FANNY: *(Everyone greets and embraces the DOANES.)* Now, *this* is a pleasant surprise! Five of my most cherished loved ones gathered in one place!

MRS.D: Oh Fanny, you know William; always full of surprises!

FANNY: Well, let me introduce you to my niece's daughter, Natalie Tait...but please call her Natty or we'll never hear the end of it!

WILLIAM: It's a pleasure to meet you, Natty.

MRS.D: Hello, Natty.

FANNY: Natty, this is William and Fanny Doane, some more of my very dearest friends.

NATTY: Fanny? *Another Fanny?!*

LADIES: Yes! *(They all laugh.)*

NATTY: I guess Frances *was* a very popular name when you were little, Aunt Fanny!

MRS.D: It *was*, Natty. Imagine our surprise when we were all first introduced and discovered we all shared the same name!

WILLIAM: *(Aside to IRA.)* More like "imagine our confusion!" *(They chuckle.)*

IRA: Now, Fanny; *(Winks at the others.)* speaking of surprises...what grand gala event do you have planned for your 87th birthday next spring? And don't tell me "nothing!" There are many people who can't wait to celebrate with you.

FANNY: Well, I expect Mr. and Mrs. Doane will come for a visit and that will be all there is to that. I don't need an extravagant event for a birthday! Lord knows I've had enough of them; I don't need this one to be any different.

MRS.SNK: Fanny, you know very well that William is *not* going to let you get away without having at least a small gathering for your birthday. I expect he'll be sending out word by this fall announcing some grand event in Bridgeport to celebrate your 87th birthday. Isn't that right, William?

WILLIAM: *(Winks.)* We'll see... *(Everyone settles in and finds a seat; gets comfortable.)*

NATTY: Oh, Aunt Fanny, we *have* to have a big party for you! It's not every day someone gets to celebrate eighty seven years! *(All adults laugh.)*

FANNY: Well, I can't argue with that! I knew longevity ran in my family but I never dreamed I'd live to be this old! If I'd known I was going to live so long I'd have taken better care of myself...to be sure! I thought I'd be approaching the pearly gates by now! *(Chuckles.)*

IRA: Fanny, if you get there before me, please watch for me at the pearly gate on the eastern side of the city. When I get there I'll take you by the hand and lead you along the golden street up to the throne of God. Then we'll stand before the Lamb of God and see Him face to face.

FANNY: And you do the same and wait for me, my dear friend.

MRS.D: Now Fanny, what did we so rudely interrupt when we surprised you with a visit? Don't let us stop what you were doing, please!

FANNY: Nothing of great importance, Mrs. Doane. Natty was just interrogating her great Aunt Fanny and I volunteered Ira as spokesman in my stead!

IRA: William, Fanny...you'll love this! We've been going through the hymnal and reminiscing about the hymns Fanny has written. It's been quite wonderful.

WILLIAM: Well, I'm afraid our visit isn't long enough to cover all eight thousand!

IRA: *NINE* thousand poems, William! *(They all laugh.)*
NATTY: Aunt Fanny...what other hymns did you write?
IRA: What about some hymns from good old George? Poor fellow never did think anyone would remember his work.
FANNY: George Stebbins was a very humble man, Ira. He just wanted his hymns to reach the lost.
MRS.SNK: He was so surprised when “Jesus is Calling” became one of the most popular hymns of the day. He just wanted to write an invitation hymn, and it caught on faster than anyone imagined.
NATTY: I think I know that one! Jesus is tenderly calling you home...right?
IRA: That’s it, Natty. A wonderful hymn.

SONG # 5 – JESUS IS TENDERLY CALLING (3:00 approx.)

Verse 1 **ALL:** Jesus is tenderly calling thee home, calling today; calling today.
Why from the sunshine of love will you roam, farther and farther away?
Calling today, calling today; Jesus is calling, is tenderly calling today.

Verse 2 Jesus is calling the weary to rest, calling today; calling today.
Bring Him thy burden and thou shalt be blest; He will not turn thee away.
Calling today, calling today; Jesus is calling, is tenderly calling today.

Verse 3 Jesus is waiting; O, come to him now, waiting today; waiting today.
Come with thy sins, at His feet lowly bow; come and no longer delay.
Calling today, calling today; Jesus is calling, is tenderly calling today.

Verse 4 Jesus is pleading; O list to His voice; hear Him today; hear Him today.
They who believe on His name shall rejoice; quickly arise and away!
Calling today, calling today; Jesus is calling, is tenderly calling today. Oh,
Calling today, calling today; Jesus is calling, is tenderly calling today.

NATTY: Aunt Fanny...you’d better hope that all three of you don’t arrive at the pearly gates at the same time! When Jesus calls your name you won’t know which one He is talking to! *(Everyone laughs.)*
IRA: You are quite right, Natty. In fact, on several occasions, Mr. Doane and I have had that very thing happen to us; isn’t that right, Fanny?
LADIES: Yes. *(The three FANNIES exchange looks then everyone laughs again.)*
IRA: *Ha!* What did I tell you! Thank heavens George Stebbins’ wife’s name was Elma! I don’t think I could have taken *one more Fanny!* *(Still more laughter.)*
FANNY: Now, getting back to George...he is the one who took my favorite poem and set it to music. There I was at a D. L. Moody conference reciting the poem, telling everyone how the words would bring comfort to my heart whenever I was troubled but it had never been published. George immediately took the words and wrote the hymn “Saved by Grace.”
MRS.SNK: We were there when you recited that! I remember it well. “Saved by Grace.” I see why the words would comfort you, Fanny. Your poem touched everyone.
MRS.D: I believe we were there as well, weren’t we, William? *(He smiles and nods.)*

FANNY: It came to me after hearing Dr. Howard Crosby, a distant relative of mine and a very dear friend, preach a sermon. They then published his sermon in a newspaper and Mr. Biglow read it to me. A few hours later I had written the poem. I'd even sent it to the publisher where it sat for two years not yet set to any music! Not until Mr. Stebbins heard it that night at the conference.

IRA: And George did a wonderful job setting it to music. (*Begins to sing.*)

SONG # 6 - SAVED BY GRACE (3:00 approx.)

Verse 1 **ALL:** Some day the silver cord will break, and I no more as now shall sing;
But oh, the joy when I shall wake within the palace of the King!
And I shall see Him face to face, and tell the story - Saved by grace!
And I shall see Him face to face, and tell the story - Saved by grace!

Verse 2 Some day my earthly house will fall. I cannot tell how soon 'twill be.
But, this I know - my All in All has now a place in heav'n for me.
And I shall see Him face to face, and tell the story - Saved by grace!
And I shall see Him face to face, and tell the story - Saved by grace!

Verse 4 Some day; till then I'll watch and wait; my lamp all trimmed and burning bright;
That when my Savior opens the gate, my soul to Him may take its flight.
And I shall see Him face to face, and tell the story - Saved by grace!
And I shall see Him face to face, and tell the story - Saved by grace!
And I shall see Him face to face, and tell the story - Saved by grace!
And I shall see Him face to face, and tell the story - Saved by grace!
And tell the story - Saved by grace!_____

MRS.SNK: So many beautiful hymns, Fanny. I believe you could bring life to *any* melody set before you!