



LUCY S. R. AUSTEN

Elisabeth Elliot

A LIFE

“Lucy S. R. Austen’s biography of Elisabeth Elliot is not only (by far) the best account we have of this fascinating woman; it is also a book that should inspire other biographers—both first-timers and veterans—to resist the relentless pressure to smooth out the rough edges of the lives they are seeking to chronicle. Here we have a story that will remind us of the twists and turns, the unexpected chapters, and the deep sense of grace that marks our own lives.”

John Wilson, Senior Editor, *The Marginalia Review of Books*; former Editor, *Books & Culture*

“Elisabeth Elliot first rose to fame by bringing the story of the ‘Auca martyrs’ to the world, but as this carefully researched and deftly written biography shows, she was much more than an iconographer. She became a provocateur who cast doubts on the triumphalism of the evangelical missions industry. She became an ardent critic of fundamentalist spirituality and cultural separatism. She encouraged a generation of evangelical artists and intellectuals who wondered if God really wanted to use their talents. And she was an arch-traditionalist who attacked modern egalitarianism, especially as it addressed gender roles. Elliot was a brilliant, difficult, and complicated person, and this biography treats her life with great sensitivity and honesty. Anyone who wants to understand Elisabeth Elliot, and indeed postwar American evangelicalism, needs to read this book.”

Joel Carpenter, Provost and Professor Emeritus, Calvin University; editor, *Christianity Remade: The Rise of Indian Instituted Churches*

“Lucy S. R. Austen’s biography of the most famous American Christian woman of the twentieth century leaves no stone unturned. This extremely detailed account reveals the inner life of a very public woman, illustrating not only her high spiritual calling but also constant tensions related to her gender. Utterly committed to her understanding of the Bible’s teachings about men and women, Elliot found herself at the whims of male Christian leaders and husbands with differing visions, as well as at odds with the women’s liberation movement and egalitarian Christianity. This book nuances the two-dimensional picture of Elisabeth Elliot merely as the widow of a famous martyr to provide a multidimensional account of women in missions and American Evangelical Christianity.”

Gina A. Zurlo, Codirector, Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

“In her day, Elisabeth Elliot was one of the most formidable women in all the world. This thoughtfully crafted biography tells the unlikely story of how a missionary kid became an American evangelical icon. Lucy S. R. Austen’s eye for what made Elliot both remarkable and human renders this book an especially compelling read.”

Heath W. Carter, Associate Professor of American Christianity, Princeton Theological Seminary

Elisabeth Elliot

Elisabeth Elliot

A Life

Lucy S. R. Austen

Elisabeth Elliot: A Life
Copyright © 2023 by Lucy S. R. Austen
Published by Crossway
1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

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First printing 2023

Printed in the United States of America.

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Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-4335-6591-5

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-6594-6

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-6592-2

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: S. R. Austen, Lucy, 1982– author.

Title: Elisabeth Elliot : a life / Lucy S.R. Austen.

Description: Wheaton, Illinois : Crossway, [2023] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021012274 (print) | LCCN 2021012275 (ebook) | ISBN 9781433565915 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781433565922 (pdf) | ISBN 9781433565946 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Elliot, Elisabeth. | Missionaries—Ecuador—Biography. | Missionaries—United States—Biography.

Classification: LCC BV2853.E3 E53 2023 (print) | LCC BV2853.E3 (ebook) | DDC 266/.023730866092 [B]—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2021012274>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2021012275>

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

SH	32	31	30	29	28	27	26	25	24	23				
15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

*That Nature Is a Heraclitean Fire
and of the Comfort of the Resurrection*

Cloud-puffball, torn tufts, tossed pillows | flaunt forth, then chevy on an air-
built thoroughfare: heaven-roysterers, in gay-gangs | they throng; they glitter in marches.
Down roughcast, down dazzling whitewash, | wherever an elm arches,
Shivelights and shadowtackle in long | lashes lace, lance, and pair.
Delightfully the bright wind boisterous | ropes, wrestles, beats earth bare
Of yestertempest's creases; | in pool and rutpeel parches
Squandering ooze to squeezed | dough, crust, dust; stanches, starches
Squadroned masks and manmarks | treadmire toil there
Footfretted in it. Million-fuelèd, | nature's bonfire burns on.
But quench her bonniest, dearest | to her, her clearest-selvèd spark
Man, how fast his firedint, | his mark on mind, is gone!
Both are in an unfathomable, all is in an enormous dark
Drowned. O pity and indig | nation! Manshape, that shone
Sheer off, disseveral, a star, | death blots black out; nor mark
 Is any of him at all so stark
But vastness blurs and time | beats level. Enough! the Resurrection,
A heart's-clarion! Away grief's gasping, | joyless days, dejection.
 Across my foundering deck shone
A beacon, an eternal beam. | Flesh fade, and mortal trash
Fall to the residuary worm; | world's wildfire, leave but ash:
 In a flash, at a trumpet crash,
I am all at once what Christ is, | since he was what I am, and
This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, | patch, matchwood, immortal diamond,
 Is immortal diamond.

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

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Preface

BIOGRAPHERS AT LEAST since Boswell have struggled with varying success against the desire to capture *everything* about their subject. Such a life would take longer to read than to live, so it's probably best that even the most dedicated researcher can't fully satisfy this yearning. Sometimes the source material doesn't tell everything we want to know. Hermione Lee notes, "You can only access [the subject] in as far as you have materials and witnesses to allow you to access them. You are at the mercy of what you can find and read and hear and see. . . . There is always going to be a gap." Sometimes the source material would take lifetimes to fully assess. Robert Caro vividly depicts the moment when, walking through one of four floors in the Johnson Library filled floor-to-ceiling with shelves of boxes of Lyndon Johnson's papers, he realized he would never be able to honor his dictum, "Turn every page."¹

Elisabeth Elliot's biographer faces both challenges. Any attempt to tell the story of Elliot's life raises questions, some unanswerable. At the same time, to examine the life of a writer and speaker involves examining her work, and Elliot's available work—thirty-one books; twenty-one years of bimonthly newsletter; twelve-and-a-half years of a radio program that ran five days a week; numerous articles, introductions, and pamphlets; and dozens upon dozens of transcripts and recordings from a fifty-year speaking career—is massive. Though time and space have precluded addressing everything, I have relied heavily on Elliot's published work in surveying her thinking over the course of her life.

Elliot knew the biographer's urge to preserve the historical record. She was also an inveterate purger. She satisfied these competing desires by donating much of what she purged to the Billy Graham Center Archives at

her alma mater, Wheaton College. Since her death in 2015, her widower, Lars Gren, and her daughter, Valerie Elliot Shepard, have made further donations to this collection, which now includes childhood scrapbooks, college photo albums, love letters, home movies, and forty years of family correspondence. The majority of my direct quotations from Elliot's unpublished writing comes from these thousands of letters; original spelling and punctuation are reproduced, except when an error was obviously caused by sticky typewriter keys.

Elliot was also a lifelong journal keeper. This private writing helped her both to mark the moments as they passed and to make meaning of the events of her life. While her complete journals are held by her family and unavailable for scholarship, portions of them are accessible from four sources. Elliot occasionally quoted her journals in her books. Shepard's published account of her parents' relationship, *Devotedly: The Personal Letters and Love Story of Jim and Elisabeth Elliot*, excerpts Elliot's 1948–1955 journals. Elliot's family has commissioned an authorized biography by Ellen Vaughn and given Vaughn exclusive access to the complete journals. The first of Vaughn's projected two volumes (2020) contains quotations from journals up to 1963. Finally, the BGC Archives holds photographs of portions of Elliot's journals donated by *Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter* editor Kathryn Deering:

- A few pages from 1938 and 1951
- January 1957–August 1959
- October–December 1960
- March 1964–September 1965
- June–August 1968
- January 1969–December 1971
- March 1972–December 1973

These cannot be directly quoted, but they shine light on Elliot's thinking during significant times in her life.

Portions of this book deal with the Waorani, who live in the eastern jungle of Ecuador. For many years, it was common practice to call indigenous people by names assigned to them by outsiders. This practice continues today, but was even more prevalent during the 1950s and 1960s, when the paths of the Waorani and Elisabeth Elliot crossed. In the 1950s, the Waorani

were largely uncontacted, and the term used for them by the neighboring Kichwa—“auca,” meaning, more or less, “savages”—was the only one anyone outside the Waorani knew to use. “Auca” was often assumed to be a proper name and thus was capitalized. As outsiders made progress in learning Wao tededo, the Waorani language, it became apparent that the group called themselves, and preferred to be called, Waorani, “the People.” The singular is Wao. There are three primary spellings: Huaorani is the Spanish spelling, while Waodani and Waorani are both used more commonly by the people themselves. Waorani is the spelling most commonly used by English speakers. This book uses “auca” only when dealing with events before outsiders learned the tribe’s name or in direct quotations.

The Kichwa are another indigenous group with whom Elliot spent time. In their mother tongue, they are Runa (singular) or Runakuna (plural), and their language is Runashimi. Kichwa is the Runashimi spelling for Quechua, the name Spanish explorers used to describe the people they found in Ecuador’s eastern lowlands as they searched for El Dorado in the 1500s. It appears to be a Spanish approximation of the Kichwa word “ghechwa,” meaning “temperate valleys,” although there are large numbers of Kichwa living in mountain regions as well. Unlike “auca,” the origins of the name Kichwa are not derogatory, and it appears that the Runakuna/Kichwa themselves use the names interchangeably. Because of this, and since “Quechua” is the name that appears in source material from the 1950s and 1960s, this book uses the Runashimi spelling of Kichwa in an attempt to both prevent confusion and respect the right of people to decide their own name.

Several people in this book, in keeping with Waorani tradition, have only one name, and many more share the same handful of last names. I largely follow the custom of using an individual’s full name once and their last name subsequently in identifying people whom Elliot knew more formally, but have chosen to use a given name or nickname for many in her life—particularly those who share the surnames Howard, Elliot, Leitch, Gren, Shepard, Saint, Fleming, McCully, and Youderian. Elliot went by various names over the course of her life, both last names and versions of her given name. She was most commonly called Betty for many decades, and that is the name I use until she becomes a published author, at which point I revert to the custom of calling her by the surname under which she published. In order to discuss themes important in Elliot’s thinking while still respecting the

right of living individuals to control the public telling of their own stories, I have in one instance replaced a name with a letter of the alphabet, and in another, avoided naming an individual entirely.

When writing about complex moments and movements in history, space constraints often require a narrow focus. This narrowness can become problematic if we are so immersed in the centered tradition that we forget that the water in which we swim is not the only or even the primary experience of the given historical period. As Catherine A. Brekus, W. Clark Gilpin, et al., have pointed out, scholarly attention in the study of American Christianity has tended to focus primarily on comparing white Protestantism in the United States with white Protestantism in the northern European nations from which early colonists came, rather than comparing American and global Christianity or various Christian experiences within the US.² This could lead to the latent assumption that white Protestantism is the American Christian experience, leaving gaping holes in our theology and practice. The cultural setting for this book is largely middle-class, white Protestantism in America from roughly the mid-1800s through the early 2000s because that is the milieu in which Elliot moved. We are the poorer if we fall into thinking that this view of the aquarium accurately represents the whole ocean, or even the largest or most important part of it.

Prologue

To a Watching World

ON MONDAY JANUARY 9, 1956, listeners to HCJB, “the Voice of the Andes,” tuning in for the “Off the Record” radio program heard a disturbing news bulletin: five young American missionaries were missing—captured or killed in the jungles of Ecuador. The men had failed to make a scheduled radio check-in after trying to establish friendly contact with an isolated tribe known as “aucas.” Over the centuries, “auca” spears had kept out Spanish conquistadors, Jesuit missionaries, nineteenth-century rubber hunters, twentieth-century oil company employees, plantation owners, neighboring tribal people—anyone who got too close to their borders. Their reputation as ferocious killers had reached almost mythic status.

Between them, the five missing Americans—Jim Elliot, Pete Fleming, Ed McCully, Nate Saint, and Roger Youderian—had ties along both coasts and through the heartland of the United States. HCJB continued to broadcast updates, which were quickly picked up in the US by NBC. As people across the country waited and prayed, a search party of neighboring Kichwa men, American missionaries, Ecuadorian soldiers, and a US Air Force air-rescue helicopter crew looked for the missing men by water, land, and air. On Tuesday, the Associated Press picked up the story, reporting that the missionaries’ plane had been seen from the air, stripped to the frame. One lance-pierced body lay on the beach nearby. On Wednesday, a second body was spotted, and AP headlines proclaimed, “5 U.S. Missionaries Are Believed Slain.” Thursday’s headline read, “Four Bodies Found in Ecuador.” On Saturday, January 14, the ground search party returned: all five men were dead.¹

Hope for a rescue came to an end, but interest in what came to be called “Operation Auca” did not. On January 23, *Time* magazine ran a two-column synopsis of the event. On January 29, the *New York Times* published an article running to more than a page of newsprint, which placed the missionaries’ deaths against the backdrop of a vast, hostile jungle where “barbaric” tribes fought to survive, relying on violence for self-preservation and living in fear.² The next day, *Life* magazine broke the first detailed story on “Operation Auca.”

Life’s nine-page spread introduced America to the faces of the five men—and the wives and young children they left behind—and told their story using excerpts from their diaries, film from their cameras (including the first photographs of the mysterious “aucas”) and a moving photo essay by *Life* photographer Cornell Capa. Hurrying from New York to Ecuador, Capa had arrived just in time to record the last of the bodies being towed through the river, the hasty burial in a common grave, the soldiers nervously fingering rifles as they watched the jungles for signs of attack, and the drawn faces of the widows as they listened to details of the search and burial. Readers learned, in the men’s own words, of their unexpected discovery of “auca” settlements during a routine flight, their strong desire to contact the tribe, the weeks of aerial gift drops and attempts to learn a few friendly phrases in the “auca” language, of a promising peaceful contact. Then the text told of harsh deaths, of the quiet strength of the widows in the face of grief, and of their desire that at some point, friendly missionary contact would still be made with the tribe that had killed their husbands. The article opened a window from America’s living room into two alien worlds—that of the mysterious “stone-age” Amazonian tribal people and that of America’s own evangelical Christian missionaries.

Public fascination with the story continued strong. In August, *Reader’s Digest* published an article by Abe Van Der Puy of HCJB radio, called “Through Gates of Splendor.” Van Der Puy had planned, at the request of the five widows, to expand that article into a full-length book, but as time went by, decided that his time and talents precluded a project of that scope. The task fell instead to one of the widows, Elisabeth Elliot, who had some background as a writer, and who was already at work compiling her husband Jim’s letters and diaries into a biography.

In May 1957, about sixteen months after their first article had appeared, *Life* ran a follow-up article by Capa on the widows, with pictures—Barbara Youderian helping a Jivaro tribal woman learn the alphabet, Elisabeth Elliot teaching Bible classes for the Kichwa, Marilou McCully caring for missionaries' children, Marj Saint preaching in an Ecuadorian prison. The women saw this work as their vocation, with or without their husbands, and were continuing it, while praying that someone, somehow, would still be able to reach the “aucas.” The article was timed to coincide with the release of Elisabeth Elliot's book on “Operation Auca,” *Through Gates of Splendor*. The biography of Jim, *Shadow of the Almighty*, which had been put on hold while she wrote *Through Gates of Splendor*, was published the next year.

And then in November 1958, shocking the nation, *Life* magazine ran an eight-page article, “Child among Her Father's Killers: Missionaries Live with Aucas.” Rachel Saint, sister of one of the dead men, and Elisabeth Elliot, with her three-and-a-half-year-old daughter, Valerie, had been invited to live, were in fact living, with the people who had killed their loved ones. Here were pictures: Valerie standing by one of the killers, Elisabeth cutting an “auca” woman's hair, Rachel and Elisabeth working together over vocabulary files. The article, written by Elisabeth Elliot in a thatched-roof, open-wall hut, described how she and Rachel Saint had been invited to join the tribe, talked about what it was like to live among them, and pondered the nature of God's leading and protection. It was read by approximately eighty-seven million Americans, an astounding 76 percent of adults. This was followed, in 1961, by Elliot's *The Savage My Kinsman*, a large coffee table-style book full of pictures and descriptions of “auca” tribal life and of Elisabeth and Valerie's life in their midst, interspersed with meditations on “auca” and American culture and on Christian faith.

Two years later, Elisabeth Elliot left the “aucas.” She brought her daughter, Valerie, back to the United States and built a life for herself as a writer and Christian speaker.

This is how she is best known and most often remembered. It is neither the beginning of her story, nor the end.

PART 1

1926-1952

Elisabeth Howard the Great

IN MAY 1927, as Charles Lindbergh soared east over the Atlantic from New York to Paris, a little American family of four, warmly bundled against the ocean breeze, steamed west from Belgium to the United States. They were missionaries, going home on furlough.

The mother of the little family, born Katharine Gillingham, was a slim, pretty woman in her late twenties, vivacious and outspoken. She had grown up with money, thanks to a great-uncle who had cornered the market on lightweight, versatile white pine just before a building boom, then bought stock in Bell Telephone Company at ten cents a share. Her father and grandfather ran a successful lumber business in Philadelphia. Her parents, Ida and Frank Gillingham, had a butler, a cook, two maids, a laundress, and a nanny for little Katharine, who was substantially younger than her two brothers. The family spent summers away from the city, where it was cooler. Katharine's parents held season tickets to the opera and treated their children with lovely things—their little daughter had a fur coat and hat, and a doll with a complete wardrobe, right down to kid gloves and silk stockings, made by her mother's dressmaker.

When Katharine was twelve, Ida Gillingham died, perhaps of pneumonia. Never a demonstrative man, her father withdrew into what Katharine later called a "black despair."¹ Doubly shaken by his grief on top of her own, Katharine tried to comfort her father by putting a brave face on her sorrow.

Although the family had always attended church, Christian faith didn't come alive for Frank Gillingham until, turning the pages of his wife's worn Bible after her death, he saw how much it had meant to her. He began

attending Bible studies with Ida's sister, Lizzie, then taking Katharine, the only child still at home, with him to Lizzie's church. It was here that Katharine heard an explication of Christian teaching that rang true and made the faith her own.

Gradually, as the heavy weight of grief lessened, Katharine returned to her interests in school and friends. Frank Gillingham disapproved of college for women, so after high school graduation, she did volunteer work (World War I was in full swing) and spent time with friends. Her father bought her a car, and she was one of the first female drivers in Philadelphia. She must have cut quite a figure, zooming around the city with her fox furs flying.

The father of the little family on the steamship was Philip Eugene Howard Jr. Just a year older than his wife, he was tall and thin, thoughtful and well-spoken. Philip had loved to be outdoors from an early age—hiking, fishing, or just standing quietly, hands clasped behind his back, watching birds. As a boy, he could also be something of a harum-scarum. On one occasion he fired his slingshot from a hotel balcony at a wine merchant's display until he broke a bottle. On another, he played with Fourth of July fireworks his parents had forbidden. The resulting explosion cost him his left eye.

Philip's parents did not have a large margin financially. Family vacations were generally spent at an uncle's cottage in the mountains of New Hampshire, an affordable way to enjoy outdoor pursuits. They had one servant, a maid-of-all-work, thought of by many as the bare minimum for middle-class households at the time. And meat was a luxury at their dinner table. But Philip Howard Sr. and Annie Slosson Trumbull Howard were a warm, loving couple with a strong sense of fun and an active interest in people. They enjoyed their family a good deal.

Philip's father was publisher of the *Sunday School Times*, a major provider of Sunday school materials both nationally and internationally. The SST, as the Howards called it in their family shorthand, was something of a family business, bought by Philip's grandfather in the 1870s and edited first by the grandfather, then by an uncle, so the family name was fairly well-known within the evangelical world. Although Philip never had a crisis of belief in

the religion his parents taught him, he struggled with a sense of failure in trying to live up to the standards he had learned, until one night a long talk with his uncle and a spiritual experience during prayer brought him settled peace. He was eighteen years old. Unable to enlist during the war because of his glass eye, he spent a year with the Pocket Testament League, handing out New Testaments and talking with men in Army camps around the country. Then he enrolled at the University of Pennsylvania. During his senior year he was elected to the prestigious Phi Beta Kappa academic honor society.

In the summer of 1918, Philip Howard attended a Victorious Life conference, where he responded to an altar call for missionary work. Among the others who went forward was a young woman named Margaret Haines, with whom Philip became friends. A few months later, Margaret introduced him to her neighbor, Katharine Gillingham. After two years of seeing each other in group settings—drives with friends, eating in company, birthday parties, house parties—Philip proposed. Katharine, who had already turned down several other marriage proposals, was startled; she had thought Philip interested in Margaret Haines. She made him wait six weeks while she thought it over—but he can't have been too worried, because he went home and told his family he was “practically engaged.”²

His confidence was justified. She said yes on October 18, 1920. The couple took classes together at the Bible Institute of Pennsylvania, and since both had felt before they knew each other that God wanted them to work as missionaries, they prayed together about the where and the how. They eventually decided to join the Belgian Gospel Mission.

Philip and Katharine were married June 14, 1922. Their honeymoon—spent at Gale Cottage, where Philip had vacationed as a boy—was chiefly distinguished by a whole ham that Katharine had unwittingly purchased. She had always had other people to cook for her and hadn't realized that a ham was too large a cut of meat for two people. They ate ham in every form imaginable over the two weeks. Then they went home to pack. They sailed for Belgium a month after their wedding.

The Howards moved into a flat fifty-eight steps above a wine shop, with no running water and a bathroom shared with the neighbors. It was furnished with what Katharine later called “a huge and hideous” miscellany of furniture and heated by a single coal stove.³ They were plunged immediately into work. Philip was made responsible for teaching a group of children from a nearby slum, although he and Katharine had just begun learning French. But despite the hard work, the Howards were happy. Philip bought a canary, and its bright songs cheered their little flat. They made some good friends. And they were young and in love.

In 1923, Katharine got pregnant. The thought of climbing all those stairs with a baby and a stroller was overwhelming. The Howards moved to a three-room flat—with running water!—on the second story of a brick row house. Philip Gillingham Howard was born on December 9, 1923. By this time Philip Eugene Howard Jr. was fluent in French and teaching in a French-language Bible school run by the mission. Katharine cared for little Phil and taught a French-language Bible class as well.

The Christmas Phil was two, Katharine spent most of December in the hospital because of a miscarriage. So the next year, when she was pregnant again and due in December, she talked the doctor into attending her at home. This time the baby was a girl. They named her Elisabeth.

Elisabeth Howard was a nice plump baby with a full head of downy blonde hair. Her father called her Betty; her mother, Bets or Bet. Her first memory of her mother was of sitting on Katharine’s lap and looking up into her blue, blue eyes. Despite the nondemonstrativeness of her own upbringing, Katharine rocked and sang to her babies and tucked her children in at night with kisses. She was still the cheerful, lively person she had been in girlhood. For Katharine, lights blazed, radios blared, and children clattered around—a tendency toward the dramatic which young Betty picked up. When something tickled Katharine’s funny bone she would laugh until tears rolled down her cheeks. She kept a neat house, and though she had come a long way from the honeymoon ham, she was still a no-nonsense cook. Dessert was usually something easy, canned fruit or store-bought cookies. If Betty asked for something

more elaborate, Katharine would say, “You just go ahead and do all the fiddling you want.”⁴

Betty would later write that as a child, she found her father’s presence in their home “comforting.”⁵ He got back from work at the same time every night, and Betty would hang around the door watching for him, then wrap herself around his knees as he came inside. Philip had a sharp temper and would slam doors or stand up so quickly from the table that he knocked over his chair. He could be passive-aggressive, using his command of language to bait and provoke. But he struggled with himself, increasingly mastered his outbursts over time, and never let a blowup pass without apologizing afterward. And he was a fun daddy. He did sleight-of-hand magic tricks for the children and rode them around on his feet. Sometimes, for a special treat, he would take one of them on the train with him to his office. They would have lunch at a restaurant, and the child would spend the day playing with his paperclips and being fussed over by the staff. On Saturdays, he led long walks or outings to the zoo, the planetarium, the ocean. Philip loved birds, and he taught his children to recognize their calls and songs, to walk quietly and stand still, to identify nests and flight patterns. Every family member had their own bird call with which Philip called them when he wanted them. Betty’s was the wood pewee.

When the little family of four—Philip, Katharine, three-year-old Phil, and five-month-old Betty—crossed paths with Lindbergh over the Atlantic, the Howards had been five years in Belgium and were taking their first furlough. Back in the States, they did some traveling before settling in to spend the rest of their three-month stay with Katharine’s father and his second wife, Katharine’s Aunt Lizzie. Then Philip’s Uncle Charley, now editor of the *SST*, dropped a bombshell: he wanted Philip to come and work for him as the assistant editor.

The Howards were greatly upset. Philip had always said that if there was one thing he would never do, it was work for the *SST*. Katharine was pregnant again and couldn’t imagine having anyone but her Belgian doctor for the delivery. They had been happy and settled in their little flat, with their friends and their work, looking forward to many more years there.

But Uncle Charley, the same uncle whose “wonderful talk” had made such a difference in Philip’s spiritual life, must have made a persuasive case.⁶ The Howards didn’t even want to consider his proposition, but as they wrestled with it, they came to the conclusion that God wanted them to accept it.⁷ So they did. Katharine would later write that at the time, it was the hardest decision they had ever faced.

In Belgium they had lived on a \$100-a-month missionary salary provided by Katharine’s father. When they decided to stay in the US, they had to scramble to find a place to live. They scraped together the money to buy a narrow three-story house with a tiny yard in the Germantown section of Philadelphia. The house needed major repairs—a new roof, which Frank Gillingham paid for, and a new furnace. Only one room was really warm in the winter, and it was that first winter that the baby, christened David Morris Howard, was born. In a humorous reversal of the era’s popular Holiness motto, “Not somehow, but triumphantly,” Katharine later said that the first year back in the US was survived, “NOT TRIUMPHANTLY, BUT SOMEHOW!”⁸

The next year, the Great Depression hit. The two hundred dollars the Howards had painstakingly saved disappeared when their bank failed. Although Frank Gillingham replaced the lost savings, this marked the beginning of what Katharine later called the days they did without—“Without maids, without money, without new clothes, without a washer, dryer, vacuum cleaner, radio, car—you name it, we didn’t have it.”⁹ Philip’s salary was cut. Katharine did the laundry by hand. Phil, Betty, and eventually Dave walked the 2 miles to school in all weathers, then home again at noon for a hot lunch. Katharine taught the children the maxim “Wicked waste makes woeful want.”¹⁰ They practiced many small economies—turning off the water, turning out the lights, using a tiny dot of toothpaste, saving the slivers of soap from the end of a bar in a small wire basket to be swished in dishwater. Betty was embarrassed by all the hand-me-downs they wore. But their house was furnished with beautiful oriental rugs and sterling silverware passed down from the Gillingham family, and they always had money to give—in the offering at church, to missions, to the down-and-out who came to their back door. It was not until she was in her teens that Betty began to realize that not everyone had those things.

Spiritual disciplines provided the framework for life in the Howard home. Philip rose early every morning for private prayer. Breakfast was at 7:00, and the children quickly learned that they were to be washed, dressed, and in their chairs by 6:55. After breakfast came family prayers—a hymn, a page from Hurlebut's *Story of the Bible*, Philip's short prayer for the help each needed for that day, and the Lord's Prayer—before everyone went their separate ways. After that, Katharine went to her rocking chair with her Bible, hymnbook, and prayer notebook. Dinner always ended with Philip reading aloud the day's selection of Bible verses from *Daily Light*, and with prayer.

Sunday was treated as a special day. The children had Sunday clothes, which they did not change out of after church. They played quietly and often went to noon dinner at Frank and Lizzie Gillingham's house—where they reveled in roast beef and chocolate cake—or had company to dinner. Meals at home were simpler, both because of Katharine's cooking and because of financial constraints. Soup and macaroni-and-cheese made regular appearances on the table, and there wasn't something different when company came, just more of it. But regardless of what was on the menu, hospitality was important. The children met many different people, often missionaries, from a wide range of backgrounds, and heard their stories. Dinner guests like Chinese missionary Leland Wang, with his motto, “no Bible, no breakfast,” and the American Betty Scott Stam, who was later beheaded in China, made lasting impressions on Betty.¹¹

Philip and Katharine ran an orderly household in other ways as well, teaching by example that there was a place for everything, and that things were to be in their places when not in use. Katharine cleaned the kitchen as she worked; Philip cleared his desktop before stopping work for the day. There was a switch over the door in every room. The parents looked a child in the eyes and gave a command, then moved for the switch if the child didn't obey. Betty had the courage of her convictions from infancy; she was stubbornly committed to her own courses of action, and she often refused to cry when spanked. She got more licks than Dave, who had figured out that punishment ended sooner if he howled right away. The children were expected to show respect—for adults, for authority, for private property—and to tell the truth. This teaching had its effect on Betty's conscience. When she was seven or eight years old, she decided she wanted to see what it was like to do something wrong and began looking for an opportunity. One

day, leaving a friend's house, she found a Mickey Mouse watch lying on the newel post of the stairs. She stuffed it in her pocket and kept walking but hadn't gone far before the sensation of guilt became unbearable. She ran back to the house and left the watch on the back steps. Phil and Dave refused, often roughly, to let their sister play with them, and there were few girls close to Betty's age nearby.¹² When friends were available, she played "house" and other games with them. Otherwise she played alone or with her imaginary friend, Miss Dowd. Betty was praying for a sister, so she was pleased when her mother began knitting baby booties and gathering supplies to take care of a new baby. Virginia Anne Howard, called Ginny, was born in February 1934.

That was the beginning of two difficult years in the Howard family. First, as she did with all her children, Katharine had great difficulty with breastfeeding. It's not clear whether she was ever able to establish nursing. A private nurse, recovering from a major illness and wanting light work, came in to help. Then in short order, Philip got sick with his frequent and worrisome chest congestion, Betty got tonsillitis, and Phil got the measles, then the mumps. Just as he was recovering, Betty came down with mumps, and just as she was getting over them, Dave got them. Finally, Katharine had them as well. They had a quarantine sign on their door for five long months, meaning that only the primary wage earner could go in or out. After the mumps, Phil, Betty, and Dave had to have their tonsils out, and Dave had to have surgery on his inner ear. Then in November, Katharine got pregnant again. Thomas Trumbull Howard was born on a scorching late July day in 1935. Again Katharine struggled to breastfeed but was unable to. About the same time, Philip was ordered to half days of bed rest by his doctor in an attempt to ward off tuberculosis. He went to the office in the mornings, then worked at a lap desk in bed at home in the afternoons.

By 1936 family finances must have begun to improve. Philip and Katharine bought their first car, a used Plymouth, and sold the little house. With each new baby the house had felt smaller and smaller, and they were glad to move into a rental in a quiet neighborhood in Moorestown, New Jersey. The new house had seventeen rooms—though still only one bathroom!—and a

big porch on two sides where the babies could play in the sun, and a large yard with mature trees and a sandbox.

The Howard household revolved around books and writing. There were bookcases in almost every room, even in the halls. The Bible was the book of books, and each child was given his or her own at age ten. Even as babies they were given picture books, and their mother read aloud to them from an early age. The dressed animals of Beatrix Potter gave Betty a “delicious feeling of order and comfort.”¹³ She identified the animals of A. A. Milne with members of the family: Katharine was Kanga, Phil was Pooh, Dave was Piglet, and she herself was Eeyore—a little apart from the others, seeing things differently from her own corner of the Hundred Acre Wood. Philip also read aloud to the children: Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, English travel writer George Borrow, to give them an ear for good writing, and Henry A. Shute’s *Diary of a Real Boy*, which made them all roar with laughter. He kept a dictionary by the dinner table to settle any points of difficulty over the correct use of language. The children were aware that they came from a family of writers—their father, their great-uncle Charley, their great-great-aunt Annie Trumbull Slosson, and her brother, their great-grandfather H. Clay Trumbull.¹⁴

Betty’s earliest surviving foray into publishing was a short book entitled *Party*, about a little girl’s party for her doll. Philip ran a family newspaper for a while, and involuntary contributions were solicited from each of the children. Young Betty kept a diary, written with a chronically dull pencil in a large, round hand and labeled in all caps as being entirely off-limits to boys. It chronicled the happenings of a child’s existence: playing at friends’ houses; Sunday with its routine; school and its woes; playing Sorry and Tiddlywinks with friends; her father coming down with one of his worrisome colds; her little brother spilling her mother’s coffee all over the good tablecloth; hide-and-seek and tag with her younger siblings when it was too chilly to go out; a real party at Aunt Annie’s with games and favors.

In addition to the steady emphasis on tidiness, household chores were assigned to the children. They learned to make their beds, do the dishes, set the table, help with laundry, take out the trash, dust, sweep, and shake out the rugs. Betty helped to care for each of her three youngest siblings as they arrived. Katharine also had a series of live-in “mother’s helps,” who must have seemed more like a burden than a help at times. Some were

Bible school students, gone the better part of the day. One woman would lean over the banister in the morning and call down that she hadn't slept all night and couldn't possibly work that day; then Katharine had to bring her breakfast in addition to her other work. Another took the chickens Katharine had stewed for a company dinner, poured the good broth down the drain, and stuffed the chickens into the quart jars meant for the broth, mangling the dinner.

In the summer the Howard family adjourned to the White Mountains of New Hampshire, to the cavernous old house where Philip had vacationed as a boy and where Katharine and Philip had honeymooned. The house was lighted with kerosene lamps, heated with a huge fireplace, and filled with all manner of strange and wonderful things—fishing rods and guns, old furniture, stuffed animal heads, glass cases of pinned moths and butterflies, a stereopticon, paintings of distant and forbidding ancestors. Gale Cottage was a repository for a whole raft of eclectic reading material: Civil War field manuals; law books; Mrs. Oliphant; the unabridged *Arabian Nights*; Robert Louis Stevenson; *Hell on Ice*. The children read, swam, hiked, fished, played, hosted hymn-sings, made friends with the mice and chipmunks who crept into the house at night, watched birds, played charades, and learned botany from making pressed-flower books. Betty developed a love for nature that lasted the rest of her life.

In junior high, she began a scrapbook: snapshots with friends from summer camp; a report card that said she talked too much; a letter from author L. M. Montgomery in response to Betty's fan mail; brochures about nursing, a profession she was interested in pursuing. She kept souvenirs from a seemingly endless stream of plays, choir and orchestra concerts, variety shows, talent shows, and missionary meetings; a week with a friend at the friend's family summer home; the World's Fair; her second-place finish in the Moorestown Grange Spelling Bee.

During this period Betty put a good deal of time into art: drawing elegant fashions for paper-dolls, entering a coloring contest at Christmastime, and turning in several nicely illustrated school projects. She did a lot of writing, both in and out of school: stories of the Howard family dog, Tuck; an ending of her own to "The Lady or the Tiger?," a story about a young man's first date; a novella by "Elisabeth Howard, the Great."¹⁵ As a freshman she won a contest sponsored by the American Legion with her essay

on Americanism. Like much of her work at this time, it shows a tendency toward melodrama that would do credit to a young Anne Shirley. Betty had a penchant for writing stories featuring young women named Annie in hair-raising blood-and-thunder plots with impossibly starry-eyed endings.

One winter day, thirteen-year-old Betty came home from school and went into the kitchen to see her mother, who was fixing dinner. When Katharine looked up and asked, “Which would you like to have—another brother or another sister?” Betty’s heart sank. She felt she had “helped to raise” the last two babies and didn’t want to do it again.¹⁶ The youngest Howard baby was born in 1940 on another hot July night and christened James Nash. The arrival of each new sibling provided Katharine with a natural opportunity to teach her elder daughter about human reproduction. Before Ginny was born, Katharine explained the way a baby grew inside its mother; this time she talked about a father’s role in the process. Not long after, she took Betty for a drive and a more detailed discussion of menstruation and sex.

It was an important coming-of-age moment, but certainly not the first—nor the most pivotal—for Betty. The gift of a nicely bound Bible for her tenth birthday had been emblematic of other changes in her life. Betty had believed her parents’ teaching about God as a young child of four or five. But it was the year she was ten that she had heard a preacher talk about Jesus’s teaching that “no one can see the kingdom of God without being born again” (John 3:3 GNT). She wanted to be sure that she was in a position to “see the kingdom of God,” so when the preacher gave an altar call, she had gone forward. As her understanding of Christian teaching continued to deepen, she had come to the conclusion that if she was going to accept Jesus’s offer of rescue, she would need to let him be the one in charge of her life. She was twelve when she made a commitment to follow Jesus, praying: “Lord, I want you to do anything you want with me.”¹⁷