ELISABETH ELLIOT

8

Elisabeth Elliot

A Widow in the Forest, a Writer Who Would Not Pretend, and a Long Obedience



Portraits of Courage – Elisabeth Elliot

A Widow in the Forest, a Writer Who Would Not Pretend, and a Long Obedience

Ochorus Originals

First published 2026.

OCHORUS

About Ochorus

"To make the epic classics of the Christian faith free to the Church around the world — in their own language, to the glory of God."

Ochorus is a Christian ministry based in Victoria, Canada, and Kampala, Uganda. Since 2021 we have been finding the great Christian books of the past, editing them carefully for today's readers, and giving them away — free to read and free to keep.

We are not only a website. Books printed in Uganda are placed directly into people's hands across East Africa — at pastors' conferences, and in the churches, schools and prisons we are invited to serve.

Keep reading at ochorus.com

- Hundreds of classics, sermons and biographies — free, with no ads and no account needed.
- Books in many languages, from English and Swahili to Arabic and Hindi.
- Reading plans, highlights and notes that follow you from device to device.
- Listen aloud, or save a book to read offline.
- Free downloads like this one. Share them freely.

"Freely ye have received, freely give."

Matthew 10:8

Table of Contents

About this work — 6

Preface — 8

Introduction: The Story Everyone Knows, and the Woman Who Kept Correcting It — 13

Brussels and Germantown — 18

A House Ordered by Scripture — 23

Hampden DuBose — 28

Greek at Wheaton — 33

A Love Laid on the Altar — 38

The Waiting Years — 42

San Miguel de los Colorados — 46

Macario, and a Stolen Suitcase — 50

Quichua First — 54

8 October 1953 — 58

Shandia — 62

Palm Beach — 66

The Widow at Shandia — 71

Through Gates of Splendor — 76
Mintaka and Mankamu — 81
Into the Forest — 85
Among the Waorani — 89
The Questions She Would Not Hide — 94
Addison Leitch — 99
Lars, and Magnolia — 103
Gateway to Joy — 107
The Next Thing — 111
The Long Twilight — 115
The Legacy of Elisabeth Elliot — 119
Appendix A: Lessons from the Life of Elisabeth Elliot — 123
Appendix B: Chapter-by-Chapter Study and Reflection Guide — 128
Appendix C: Chronology of the Life and Times of Elisabeth Elliot — 142
Appendix D: Notes on Sources and Method — 147

About this work

This is a biography of Elisabeth Elliot, not a book by her. Written by Ochorus as the eighth volume of Portraits of Courage, it tells her whole life in narrative: the Brussels birth and the Philadelphia home ordered by Scripture and hymns; a Florida boarding school and Greek at Wheaton; a five-year courtship with Jim Elliot laid, by both of them, on the altar; a first year in Ecuador among the Colorado people that ended in a murder and a stolen suitcase; marriage and the Quichua work at Shandia; the deaths of Jim and four friends on the Curaray in January 1956; the two Waorani women who came to live in her house, and the October day in 1958 when she carried her small daughter into the forest to live among the people who had killed her husband; her return to America, her honest novel and her questions; two more marriages and a second widowhood; Gateway to Joy, the newsletter and the books; and the long twilight of dementia that ended at Magnolia on 15 June 2015.

It is an independent work. It is not published by, affiliated with, or endorsed by Elisabeth Elliot's family, her estate, or any company that holds rights in her writings. Her books are still in copyright and should be obtained from their publishers. This book tells her life in its own words and does not quote her writings; the only words of the Elliots it quotes are one well-known sentence from Jim Elliot's journal. Her teaching is set out in a separate Ochorus companion, The Key Teachings of Elisabeth Elliot.

Where the sources disagree, on what happened on the sandbar on 8 January 1956, on the years among the Waorani and her parting from Rachel Saint, or on the hard years of her third marriage, the book says so and gives the main accounts fairly. It is written with gratitude but not hagiography: she was brave, candid and disciplined, and she could also be stern, guarded and hard to know. All Scripture is from the King James Version. It ends with lessons from her life, a study guide, a chronology, and a note on sources with further reading, including the public-domain writers she loved that are in the Ochorus library: Amy Carmichael and David Brainerd among them.

Preface

"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."
— Isaiah 43:2, KJV

The earlier volumes of this series told of a Chinese church leader who died in a Communist labour camp, an American who prayed his way through the villages of the Punjab, a Dutch watchmaker who hid Jews behind a false wall, a Scottish mill girl who went alone up the rivers of Calabar, an African bishop who had once been sold as a slave, an Indian widow who built a home for thousands of outcast women, and an Oxford don who was found by God against his will. This eighth volume tells the story of a woman whose name, for most of the people who know it at all, is attached to a single week in January 1956, when her husband and four other young missionaries were killed on a sandbar in the Ecuadorian rainforest.

Elisabeth Elliot was twenty-nine that week, with a daughter of ten months. She lived for almost sixty years more. This book is about the whole of that life, before the sandbar and after it, and it is written in the conviction that the courage of the long years was no smaller than the courage of the short one.

Why Courage?

Some of her courage was of the kind the world recognises. Less than three years after the killings, she walked into the forest with her three-year-old daughter to live among the very people whose men had speared her husband, sleeping in their houses, eating their food and learning their unwritten language. Many people admired the decision, and a good many thought it reckless. She made it anyway, quietly, and she lived with its consequences.

But there was another kind of courage in her that is easier to overlook, and it may have cost her more. It was the courage of candour. Elisabeth Elliot would not let the story of 1956 be told more neatly than it had happened. She wrote a novel about a missionary whose best efforts end in a death she has caused, and it disturbed many of the readers who had loved her first book. She admitted in print that she did not understand why God had allowed what he allowed, and she refused to supply the tidy explanations that others found comforting. Late in life she added a frank epilogue to the most famous book she ever wrote, acknowledging that the sequel among the Waorani had been far more tangled than the first telling suggested. For a woman whose public standing rested on that story, this was not a small thing.

There was courage, too, in simply going on. She was widowed twice: Jim Elliot was killed after twenty-seven months of marriage, and her second husband, Addison Leitch, died of cancer after less than five years. She married a third time, and she kept writing, speaking and broadcasting for decades, often to people whose suffering she knew from the inside. And at the end she went through the slow loss of her own mind, in the care of a husband who stayed beside her. The long obedience of a life is not

dramatic. It is made of ordinary days and next things. But it is not easy, and it is not small.

What This Book Is

This book is a narrative life. It follows Elisabeth Howard from her birth in Brussels in 1926 to her death in Magnolia, Massachusetts, in 2015, and it tries to give the people around her their due: her parents, her four brothers and her sister, the headmistress who took a shy girl in hand, Jim Elliot and his companions, the Colorado and Quichua people among whom she first worked, the Waorani women who led her into the forest, Rachel Saint, Valerie, and the two men she married after Jim. It is not an account of her teaching. A companion volume in the Ochorus library, *The Key Teachings of Elisabeth Elliot*, sets out what she believed and taught about suffering, obedience, discipline, singleness, marriage and the sovereignty of God. The present book touches her ideas only where they are part of the story of her life.

A Word About Her Words

That is not only a matter of arrangement. Elisabeth Elliot's books, letters, newsletters and broadcasts are still in copyright, and those who hold the rights in them are entitled to guard them. This book is an independent Ochorus biography. It is not published by, affiliated with, or endorsed by her family, her estate, or any publisher or organisation that holds rights in her writings. It tells her life in its own words. It quotes her only in a handful of very short sentences, each given with its source, and where it reports what she thought or felt it does so in paraphrase. Her books are named so that readers can find them, and readers are warmly encouraged to buy

them, or borrow them from a library, and hear her for themselves. Her prose was spare, exact and often surprising, and no summary can stand in for it.

How This Book Is Written

Elisabeth Elliot told parts of her own story many times, and she was an unusually honest witness. But she was also a writer who shaped her material, and in recent years her own journals and letters, now opened to her authorised biographer and edited in part by her daughter, have filled in a fuller and sometimes different picture. Historians of the Waorani mission have added their own careful accounts. Where the sources agree, this book follows them. Where they differ, it says so and gives the main views fairly. It does not invent dialogue, and it does not put thoughts into anyone's head that the sources do not support.

Gratitude runs through these pages, but this is not a book of praise. Elisabeth Elliot could be brusque, and some who worked with her found her hard. Her views on women and marriage were, and are, contested by Christians who love Scripture as much as she did. She made decisions that others would have made differently, and she would have been the first to say that she was a sinner saved by grace. A portrait that left out the shadows would not be a portrait of her, and it would not have pleased her.

Scripture in This Book

As in the earlier volumes of this series, all Scripture is quoted from the Authorised (King James) Version, the Bible of the household in which she grew up, which is in the public domain. Each chapter opens with a passage that carries its theme.

The verse at the head of this preface is a promise she knew well. It does not say that God's people will be kept out of the waters or the fire. It says that they will pass through them, and that he will be with them there. Elisabeth Elliot's life was a long passing through, and this book is the story of how she found that promise to be true.

Introduction: The Story Everyone Knows, and the Woman Who Kept Correcting It

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."
— John 8:32, KJV

The Story Everyone Knows

In January 1956 five young American missionaries were killed by Waorani warriors on a sandbar of the Curaray River in the rainforest of eastern Ecuador. Their names were Jim Elliot, Pete Fleming, Ed McCully, Roger Youderian and Nate Saint. They had spent months preparing to make friendly contact with a people who were feared by their neighbours for killing outsiders, and who had been known to the outside world by a Quichua word, "Auca", meaning something like savage. The men called their plan Operation Auca. The people themselves use the name Waorani, which this book uses throughout. For several days the contact seemed to be going well. Then, on Sunday 8 January, the men were speared to death.

The story went round the world. *Life* magazine ran a long photo essay with pictures by Cornell Capa. Newspapers and radio stations carried it. Christian magazines and pulpits across America told and retold it, and within a few years the deaths had become, for a whole generation of evangelicals, the defining missionary story of the century. Thousands of

young people dedicated their lives to missionary service because of it. The five men became heroes, and their widows became symbols of faithful grief.

At the centre of the telling stood one of the widows, Elisabeth Elliot. It was she who wrote the book, *Through Gates of Splendor*, published in 1957, which fixed the story in the minds of millions. It was she who edited her husband's journals and wrote his life in *Shadow of the Almighty* the following year. And it was she who, with her small daughter and Nate Saint's sister Rachel, went to live among the Waorani in 1958. To many readers the sequel seemed to complete the story perfectly: the killers were converted, the widow forgave, the gospel came to the forest, and the sacrifice was vindicated.

The Woman Who Kept Correcting It

The remarkable thing is that the woman who did more than anyone to tell that story spent much of the rest of her life gently, and sometimes not so gently, declining to let it be simplified. She did not deny that God had worked. She believed to the end that he had. But she would not pretend that she could trace all his purposes, and she grew uneasy with versions of the story in which every death had a visible payoff and every loose end was tied.

Her time among the Waorani taught her that people do not divide neatly into the converted and the unconverted, that missionaries carry their own culture and their own sins into the forest with them, and that relations between fellow workers can be as hard as anything in the jungle. Her novel *No Graven Image*, published in 1966, told of a missionary linguist whose good intentions end in disaster, and many readers who had loved *Through Gates of Splendor* were dismayed. She wrote of her early losses in *These Strange Ashes* without pretending to understand them. And when *Through*

Gates of Splendor was reissued in 1996, she added an epilogue that acknowledged, plainly, that events among the Waorani had not unfolded in the simple way that admirers liked to imagine.

That candour is one of the reasons for this book. It would be easy to write a life of Elisabeth Elliot that was really a tribute to a legend. It would also be untrue to her. She spent decades telling Christians that God is to be trusted precisely because he is God, not because he explains himself, and that faith which depends on happy endings is not yet faith. A biography that smoothed away the hard places in her own story would contradict the very thing she spent her life saying.

The Sources

There are, broadly, four kinds of source for her life. The first is her own books. Besides those already named, the most important for the story told here are *The Savage My Kinsman* (1961), her photographic account of life among the Waorani; *These Strange Ashes* (1975), about her first year in Ecuador; *Passion and Purity* (1984), about her long courtship with Jim; *The Shaping of a Christian Family* (1992), about the home in which she grew up; and many shorter pieces in her newsletter and elsewhere. These are invaluable, but they were written for particular purposes, often many years after the events, by a writer who chose carefully what to tell.

The second is Jim Elliot's own journals and letters. She drew on them for *Shadow of the Almighty* and later edited a fuller selection as *The Journals of Jim Elliot* (1978). In 2019 their daughter, Valerie Elliot Shepard, published a large selection of her parents' letters to each other in *Devotedly*, which lets readers see the courtship and early marriage in their own words.

The third, and the most important development since her death, is the authorised biography by Ellen Vaughn, written with full access to Elisabeth

Elliot's private journals and letters: *Becoming Elisabeth Elliot* (2020), which takes the story to the end of her years in Ecuador, and *Being Elisabeth Elliot* (2023), which covers the rest of her life. Vaughn's volumes add a great deal that Elisabeth Elliot never published, including her private struggles, her doubts and her difficult relationships, and this book is indebted to them throughout.

The fourth is the work of others who were there or who have studied the events closely: the widows' own memories, Russell Hitt's life of Nate Saint, Olive Fleming Liefeld's account of the years before and after 1956, and the historian Kathryn Long's careful study of the Waorani mission, *God in the Rainforest* (2019). These do not always agree with one another, or with Elisabeth Elliot's own account.

How This Book Handles Disagreement

Where these sources differ on a date, a name or the order of events, this book either follows the weight of the evidence and says so, or simply notes that accounts differ. Where they differ in judgement, as they do about Rachel Saint, about the methods of the Waorani mission, and about Elisabeth Elliot's own decisions, it tries to set out the main views fairly without pretending to settle what cannot be settled. It does not invent conversations or scenes, and it does not claim to know what anyone was thinking unless they said so.

It also tries to remember that the story does not belong only to the missionaries. The Waorani had their own history, their own fears and their own reasons for what they did, and in later years some of them told their side of events to those who would listen. Their accounts, gathered by missionaries and historians, have changed the way the story of 1956 is

understood. Where they bear on Elisabeth Elliot's life, this book takes them into account.

The verse at the head of this introduction is the word of Jesus to those who believed on him. It was a word she took seriously. She believed that the truth, including the truth about one's own story, is not a threat to faith but its friend. The pages that follow try to tell her story in that spirit.

Brussels and Germantown

"The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage."
— Psalm 16:6, KJV

Born Abroad

Elisabeth Howard was born on 21 December 1926 in Brussels, the capital of Belgium. She was not Belgian. Her parents, Philip Eugene Howard Jr. and Katharine Gillingham Howard, were Americans from the Philadelphia area who had gone to Belgium as missionaries soon after their marriage in 1922, and who worked for some five years with the Belgian Gospel Mission, an evangelical mission founded during the First World War. Belgium was a Roman Catholic country still recovering from the German occupation and the devastation of the western front, and the small Protestant missions there were a very small presence in it.

She was the second of their children. A brother, Philip, had been born before her. Within a few months of her birth, when she was still a baby, her parents left Belgium and returned to the United States. She therefore had no memory of the country where she was born, and she grew up wholly American. But she was born, as it were, on the mission field, to parents who had already given some years of their lives to it, and she would later come to see that fact as more than an accident of geography.

To her family and friends she was Betty, and Betty she remained to them for most of her life. The world later came to know her as Elisabeth Elliot, and it is by that name that this book will mostly call her. But it is worth remembering that the shy, tall, serious girl of the chapters that follow was Betty Howard, and that many of the letters she wrote and received before her marriage were addressed to that name.

A Family and a Paper

What took the family home was a family enterprise of an unusual kind. For half a century the Howard family and their relatives had been bound up with the *Sunday School Times*, a weekly paper published in Philadelphia that provided Bible lessons, articles and comment for Sunday school teachers in churches of many denominations across America. At its height it was one of the most widely read evangelical papers in the country.

Elisabeth's great-grandfather on her father's side of the family was Henry Clay Trumbull, a Congregational minister, Sunday school pioneer and former chaplain in the Union army during the American Civil War, who became editor of the *Sunday School Times* in 1875 and made it a national institution. His daughter married Philip Eugene Howard, Elisabeth's grandfather, who wrote his father-in-law's biography and took a leading part in the paper's affairs. Another of Trumbull's children, Charles Gallaudet Trumbull, succeeded him as editor, and became known as a teacher of what was called the victorious life. So when Philip Howard Jr. came home from Belgium to join the staff of the *Sunday School Times*, he was entering a family tradition. He served as an associate editor and, in time, became its editor.

This inheritance mattered to Elisabeth. She grew up in a family that took it for granted that the Bible was the Word of God and that its teaching

should be plainly explained to ordinary people. She grew up, too, among people who wrote for a living, who cared about words and were impatient of sloppy ones, and who measured a sentence by whether it said exactly what it meant. The precise and unadorned prose for which she later became known had its roots in her father's editorial office as much as in any school.

Germantown

The family settled in Germantown, an old neighbourhood in the north-west of Philadelphia. Germantown had been founded by German Quakers and Mennonites in the seventeenth century, and by the 1920s it was a settled, tree-lined district of stone houses, churches and schools, a short train ride from the centre of the city. It was there that most of Elisabeth's earliest memories were formed.

The family grew. After Philip and Elisabeth came David, who would become Jim Elliot's close friend at college and later a leader in world missions; Virginia, always called Ginny; Thomas, who would become a teacher and author; and finally James. There were six children in all, four boys and two girls. The house was full, the money was never plentiful, and the household ran on routine.

The America of Elisabeth's childhood was the America of the Great Depression. The *Sunday School Times* was not a wealthy enterprise, and an editor's salary had to stretch a long way for a family of eight. The Howards were never poor in the way that many families of those years were poor, but they lived carefully. Nothing was wasted, and thrift was treated not as a hardship to be complained of but simply as the way things were done. It was a training in contentment that went deep, and that would serve her well in a forest clearing many years later.

In 1936, when Elisabeth was nine, the family moved across the Delaware River to a larger house in Moorestown, New Jersey, a quiet town in the farmland east of Philadelphia, from which her father could still travel in to the office. Moorestown was the family home for the rest of her childhood and through her college years. It was there, eleven years later, that a young man from Oregon would come to stay for Christmas.

A Shy Child

Those who knew Elisabeth Howard as a girl remembered her as quiet, bookish and painfully shy. She grew up tall, and by her own later account she felt awkward and plain beside other girls. She did not find friendship easy. She was observant rather than talkative, and in a large and lively family she was often content to watch and listen. She read a great deal. She loved the outdoors, and especially the woods and mountains of New Hampshire, where the family spent its summers. She seems to have had a strong inner life from an early age, and a strong sense of right and wrong, which was not always comfortable for her or for those around her.

It would be wrong to read too much of the later woman back into the child. But some things were there from the beginning: a reticence that strangers sometimes mistook for coldness, a dislike of sentimentality, a habit of noticing exactly what was in front of her, and a deep if still unformed seriousness about God. All of these would be shaped, in the years that followed, by the life of the household in Germantown and Moorestown, and that household deserves a chapter of its own.

The verse at the head of this chapter is David's thanksgiving for his inheritance. Elisabeth Elliot did not inherit wealth, and the heritage she was given came with responsibilities as well as privileges. But she knew that she had been given a goodly heritage, and that the lines had fallen to her in

pleasant places. Much of what follows in this book was built on that foundation.

A House Ordered by Scripture

"And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."
— Deuteronomy 6:6-7, KJV

A Book About a Home

More than sixty years after she left it, Elisabeth Elliot wrote a book about the home in which she grew up. *The Shaping of a Christian Family* was published in 1992, a few years after her mother's death, when she herself was a grandmother many times over. It is not a memoir in the ordinary sense. It is a portrait of a household, drawn from her own memories, from those of her brothers and sister, and from family letters and papers, and it was written with a purpose: to show younger Christian parents what one ordinary home, ordered by Scripture, had actually been like. Readers should remember that purpose. It is a loving book, and it chooses its material. But it is the fullest window we have into the world that made her, and nothing in the other sources contradicts its main lines.

Morning and Evening

The centre of the Howard household was family worship, and it happened twice a day, every day. In the morning, after breakfast and before anyone left for school or work, the family gathered. They sang a hymn, usually all its verses, and over the years the children learned scores of hymns by heart without ever setting out to memorise them. Their father read a passage of Scripture, and then he prayed. There were prayers again in the evening. Visitors, of whom there were many, were expected to join in, and most did.

The prayers were not vague. Philip Howard prayed for his children by name, for the work of the day, for the nation, and for missionaries all over the world, many of whom the family knew personally. The *Sunday School Times* put its editor in touch with Christian workers in many countries, and a steady stream of them passed through the Howard home, sat at its table, and told their stories. The Howard children grew up with the mission field not as a distant abstraction but as a matter of familiar faces, letters from far away, and answered and unanswered prayers. It is not surprising that several of them gave their lives to Christian service.

The children were also expected to learn Scripture by heart, and they did. The words of the King James Bible, and of the old hymns, sank into them early and stayed. Elisabeth Elliot's later writing is shot through with the cadences of both, and in the hardest seasons of her life it was often a verse learned in childhood, or a line of a hymn, that came back to her when nothing else did.

Order and Obedience

The household ran on order. Meals were at fixed times, and the family ate together. The children had their tasks and were expected to do them

without being reminded. Manners mattered: one sat up at table, waited to be served, did not interrupt, and wrote thank-you letters promptly. Obedience was expected the first time something was asked, and when it was not given there were consequences. Elisabeth later defended this kind of discipline firmly, and in a later age some readers found her defence of it severe. But the children of the house seem to have experienced it, on the whole, not as harshness but as security. They knew where the lines were, and they knew they were loved.

Sunday was set apart from the other days. The family went to church together, and the day was kept more quietly than the rest of the week. Here too the rule was not presented as a burden. It was simply the shape of the week, and the children grew up assuming that God had a claim on their time as well as on their hearts.

Katharine Howard was the practical engine of all this. She ran a large household on a small income, kept it clean and orderly, fed the family and its many guests, and set standards of courtesy and self-control that her children never quite escaped. She was capable and practical, and she expected a great deal. Philip Howard was gentler and quieter, a man of steady and unhurried faith, who loved the natural world and passed that love on to his children. Elisabeth was close to both of them, though in different ways, and she later wrote of both with deep gratitude and without pretending that either was perfect.

Franconia

Every summer the family went north to New Hampshire, to Gale Cottage, a house built by an earlier generation of the family in the village of Franconia, among the White Mountains. There, away from the city and the office, the children roamed the woods and fields, climbed the hills, swam in

cold water, picked berries, and learned the names of trees, flowers and birds. Elisabeth loved it more than anywhere else. The mountains of New Hampshire gave her something she never lost: a delight in the physical world as God's handiwork, and a need, all through her life, for quiet and for wild places. When she came back to the United States as a widow many years later, it was to Franconia that she went.

Six Children

It would be pleasant to report that a home like this produced six children who all walked the same path. The truth is more interesting. The Howard children were strong-minded, and they went in different directions. Philip, the eldest, became a missionary among the Slavey people of Canada's Northwest Territories. David became a missionary in Latin America and later a leader in world missions. Thomas became a teacher of English and a writer of distinction, and in 1985 he left evangelicalism and became a Roman Catholic, a decision that grieved some of his family and that he explained with great care in his own books. Each of the six would have told the story of their childhood a little differently.

What they shared was a common inheritance: a deep familiarity with Scripture, a habit of prayer, a respect for words, and an assumption that life is lived before God and owes him obedience. Elisabeth took all of these with her. She also took with her some of the household's reserve. The Howards were not demonstrative, and she grew up in a family where feelings were kept under control and not much discussed. That reserve would serve her well in some of the hardest moments of her life, and it would also, at times, make her seem distant to those who did not know her well.

The verse at the head of this chapter is Moses' charge to Israel's parents: to teach God's words to their children when they sat in the house, walked

by the way, lay down and rose up. Philip and Katharine Howard did exactly that, day after day, for more than twenty years. They could not make their children believe. But they gave them the words, and in Elisabeth's case the words took root.

Hampden DuBose

"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."
— Hebrews 12:11, KJV

A School in Florida

In 1941, when she was fourteen, Elisabeth Howard left home for a boarding school in Florida. The school was the Hampden DuBose Academy, a small Christian boarding school then in Orlando, which later moved a few miles north-west to Zellwood. It had been founded in 1934 by Dr Pierre W. DuBose and his wife, and it took its name from his father, Hampden Coit DuBose, a Southern Presbyterian who had spent most of his working life as a missionary in the city of Soochow in China.

The academy was a school with a missionary purpose. Many of its pupils were the children of missionaries serving overseas, and others came from Christian families who wanted an education in which faith was not an extra but the foundation. The school was small enough for everyone to know everyone else. Its days were structured from rising to lights-out: chapel, lessons, study hall, meals, work, recreation and evening vespers, each in its place. For a girl from the Howard household this was not entirely

strange. But the school also had a character of its own, and it was stamped by the personality of the woman who ran it.

Mrs DuBose

Mrs DuBose was the headmistress, and by every account she was formidable. She was a Southern lady of the old school, with exacting standards of dress, deportment, speech and manners, and decided views about what a Christian young woman ought to be. She believed that good manners were a form of consideration for others, and that awkwardness and self-absorption were faults to be corrected rather than temperaments to be indulged. She did not hesitate to tell her pupils so.

Elisabeth arrived at the school tall, gawky, and so shy that she could barely speak to people she did not know. Mrs DuBose singled her out. Elisabeth, who later described herself as a tall and very shy girl of fourteen on arrival, remembered being told plainly that shyness was not a virtue to be indulged, and that she must learn to engage with other people. The girl was frightened of her headmistress. But she took the warning seriously, and she set herself to change.

It was not a gentle education, and some of what the school prized, the ladylike graces of the American South, the careful attention to appearances, may seem to a later age to have been of doubtful importance. But Elisabeth came to believe that Mrs DuBose had done her a great service. She had been made to understand that shyness, however painful, is a form of preoccupation with oneself, and that a Christian has a duty to look outward, to put others at their ease, and to do the uncomfortable thing that love requires. She learned to stand straight, to look people in the eye, to make conversation with strangers, to speak in public, and to carry herself with a composure that later observers often mistook for natural self-

possession. It was not natural. It had been learned, at some cost, at Hampden DuBose.

She also learned something of the discipline of the inner life. The school expected its pupils to read the Bible and pray daily on their own, not merely to sit through chapel, and it expected them to think of their lives as belonging to God. Elisabeth seems to have taken all of this with the earnestness that marked her whole adolescence. She kept notebooks. She marked her Bible. She began to think seriously about what God might want her to do with her life.

A Spiritual Mother

The most lasting gift of Hampden DuBose, however, came through the evening vespers. Mrs DuBose was a great admirer of Amy Carmichael, the Irish missionary who had gone to South India in 1895 and founded the Dohnavur Fellowship, a community that rescued children in danger of being given to temple service and raised them as its own. By the 1940s Amy Carmichael had been an invalid for a decade, confined to her room after a fall, but she was still writing, and her books of devotion, poetry and missionary narrative were widely read. Mrs DuBose quoted from them often at vespers.

Elisabeth was captivated. She found in Amy Carmichael a voice unlike any she had heard: severe and tender at once, utterly without sentimentality, uncompromising about the cost of discipleship, and yet full of a kind of gaiety. Amy Carmichael wrote about the missionary life as it actually was, with its disappointments, its loneliness and its unglamorous daily duties, and she insisted that the love of Christ asks for everything. In her little book *If*, a series of searching tests of the heart, each of the short entries ends with the same refrain: "then I know nothing of Calvary love."

For a serious girl of fourteen, already wondering whether God might be calling her to the mission field, it was strong and heady reading.

Elisabeth later spoke of Amy Carmichael as her first spiritual mother, and the influence lasted for the rest of her life. More than forty years after those vespers she wrote a full-length biography of her, *A Chance to Die*, published in 1987. Some of the qualities readers most associated with Elisabeth Elliot, her suspicion of emotionalism in religion, her insistence on obedience whether or not one feels like it, her readiness to accept suffering as part of the Christian's portion, and her plain, unadorned style, can be traced back in part to the books she first heard read aloud in a Florida chapel.

1944

Elisabeth stayed at Hampden DuBose for three years. They were the years of the Second World War. The United States entered the war in December 1941, a few months after she arrived, and by the time she graduated the war had reached into almost every American family. Florida filled with training camps and airfields. The war did not touch the school directly, but it gave an edge of seriousness to the talk of giving one's life to God that she heard at chapel.

She graduated in 1944 with a changed manner. She was still reserved. She would always be reserved. But she had learned to master her shyness instead of being mastered by it, and she had begun to believe that God had work for her to do in the world. She had settled, too, on what that work might be. She wanted to translate the Bible into languages that had never had it, and for that she would need a thorough knowledge of the language in which the New Testament had been written. In the autumn she went to Wheaton College, in Illinois, to study Greek.

The verse at the head of this chapter speaks of discipline that seems grievous at the time and yields its fruit afterward. Elisabeth did not enjoy everything about Hampden DuBose, and she was frightened of its headmistress. But she lived to be grateful for both, and the fruit of those three years was visible in her for the rest of her life.

Greek at Wheaton

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."
— 2 Timothy 2:15, KJV

A College on the Prairie

Wheaton College stands in the town of Wheaton, Illinois, some twenty-five miles west of Chicago, on what was once open prairie. It had been founded in 1860 under Jonathan Blanchard, an abolitionist and reformer, and by the 1940s it was perhaps the best-known evangelical liberal arts college in the United States. Its students signed a pledge of conduct, attended chapel daily, and were taught by a faculty committed to the authority of Scripture. Its president when Elisabeth Howard arrived in the autumn of 1944 was V. Raymond Edman, who had himself been a missionary in Ecuador in the 1920s, working among the Quichua of the Andean highlands until illness forced him home. No one could have known how much that country would come to mean to several of the students then passing through his chapel services.

The college Elisabeth entered was a wartime college. Many of the young men were away in the forces, and for a time women made up a large share of the student body. After the war ended in 1945 the veterans came back in numbers, older and more serious than ordinary undergraduates, many of

them studying on government grants, and the campus grew crowded and lively. Through all of it the rhythms of the college went on: lectures, chapel, literary societies, prayer meetings, and the steady pressure of students who wanted to know what God was calling them to do.

Why Greek

Elisabeth chose to major in classical Greek. It was an unusual choice for a young woman in 1944, but she had a clear reason for it. She believed God was calling her to translate the Bible for a people who did not yet have it, and she wanted to be able to work from the original text of the New Testament rather than from an English version. The course was demanding. Students read Homer, the dramatists, the historians and Plato as well as the New Testament, and they learned the grammar thoroughly, by drill and repetition, in the old way.

Greek suited her. She had a precise mind, a good ear and the patience to work through difficult texts word by word. The discipline of translation, of finding exactly the right word in one language for a word in another, and of refusing to settle for a vague approximation, became part of her habit of thought. Those who later admired the clarity of her English prose were often admiring, without knowing it, the fruit of four years of Greek composition. She came to love the language for its own sake, and she kept her Greek New Testament close for the rest of her life.

She was, by the accounts of those who knew her at Wheaton, a serious and rather solitary student, more respected than popular. She was not unfriendly, but she was reserved, and she did not chase the social life of the campus. She was deeply concerned to know and do God's will, and she prayed about it constantly. She had decided that she would rather remain

single and serve God on the mission field than marry the wrong man, and she was quite prepared for that to be her lot.

Jim Elliot

In the autumn of 1945 a new student arrived from Portland, Oregon. Philip James Elliot, always called Jim, had been born there on 8 October 1927, the third of four children of Fred and Clara Elliot. His father preached in the small Plymouth Brethren assemblies to which the family belonged, and his mother was a chiropractor. Jim had grown up in a home as devout, in its own way, as the Howards', and he had come to faith as a small boy. At high school he had already been a confident public speaker. At Wheaton he threw himself into everything. He joined the wrestling team and became one of its best members. He was active in the student missionary fellowship. And he, too, chose to study Greek.

Jim was a year younger than Elisabeth and a year behind her at college. He was handsome, athletic, outspoken and intense, with a strong sense of humour and a habit of saying exactly what he thought. He had very little time for what he regarded as frivolity, including much of the social life of the college, and he had decided views about the dangers of romantic entanglements for a young man who meant to serve God. He read the lives of missionaries and was moved above all by the diary of David Brainerd, the young American who had given his short life to preaching among the native peoples of New York, Pennsylvania and New Jersey in the 1740s, and who had died at twenty-nine. Brainerd's single-minded devotion, and his willingness to be spent for God, became something of a pattern for Jim.

Jim's closest friend at Wheaton was Elisabeth's younger brother, David Howard, who wrestled alongside him and shared his missionary zeal.

Elisabeth knew Jim by sight and by reputation, as one knows people at a small college. It was through Dave that she came to know him better.

Christmas in Moorestown

At Christmas 1947 Dave invited Jim home to Moorestown for the holidays. Jim stayed with the Howards, joined in the family prayers and hymn-singing, and talked late into the evenings. He seems to have felt at home in a household so like his own in its seriousness about God. It was in the weeks that followed that he began to notice Dave's sister in a new way.

When the new term began in January 1948, Elisabeth and Jim found themselves in some of the same Greek classes, and they began to study together. They were both good at it, and both competitive. They talked about Greek, about the Bible, about missions and about the will of God. Jim had just begun to keep a journal, which would one day be published and read by hundreds of thousands, and he began, guardedly, to write about her in it. Elisabeth, for her part, kept her own counsel, and her own journal. Each was, in a sense, waiting to see what the other would do, and each was determined not to do anything that God had not plainly sanctioned.

She was a senior, and in June she would graduate. Neither of them knew what the spring would bring, or that it would begin a story that would occupy them for more than five years before it reached any resolution.

The verse at the head of this chapter is Paul's charge to Timothy to be a workman who handles the word of truth rightly. It was the verse that might have stood over Elisabeth's Greek grammar. She went to Wheaton to learn to handle God's word with care, so that she might one day give it to others

in their own tongue. She learned that, and she learned something else besides, which she had not gone looking for.

A Love Laid on the Altar

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."
— Romans 12:1, KJV

Spring 1948

Through the early months of 1948 Elisabeth Howard and Jim Elliot studied Greek together, talked, and watched each other. At the end of April they went together to a large Christian gathering in Chicago, which was, by the standards of the time and the place, a date, though neither of them would have used the word lightly. As the spring went on, it became clear to both of them that something more than friendship was growing. It became equally clear that neither knew what to do about it.

For Elisabeth the difficulty was partly one of temperament. She had been brought up to believe that a woman did not reveal her feelings to a man until he had declared his, and she held to that conviction firmly. She was also reserved by nature, and anxious not to want anything that God had not given. Her private journals from these months, now drawn on by her biographer, show that the outward composure was not the whole story. She was in love, and she found the uncertainty very hard to bear.

For Jim the difficulty was one of conviction. He had come to believe, from his reading of Scripture, that God might be calling him to remain single for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He had taken very seriously Paul's words in the seventh chapter of First Corinthians about the unmarried man caring for the things of the Lord, and Christ's words about those who make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom's sake. He thought that a missionary pioneer, going into hard and dangerous places, might be better without a wife, and he feared that marriage might divide his heart. He was not sure. But he was not willing to proceed until he was sure, and he was not willing to let his feelings decide the question for him.

A Walk in June

On 9 June, shortly before Elisabeth's graduation, the two of them went for a walk in the evening, south of the campus, and came to a cemetery. There, by their own later accounts, they spoke openly for the first time of what each felt for the other. And Jim told her also that he believed God might be leading him to remain single, at least for now, and that he could not ask her for anything or promise her anything.

They agreed, in the end, to give the matter back to God. The image they both used, then and later, was of the altar. In the twenty-second chapter of Genesis, God asks Abraham to offer his son Isaac, the son of the promise, as a burnt offering on Mount Moriah. Abraham goes, builds the altar, binds Isaac and lays him on it, and only then does God provide a ram instead. Jim and Elisabeth understood their love in that light. It was a gift from God, and it was precious, and for that very reason it must be offered back to him without conditions. If God gave it back to them, well and good. If he did not, they would trust that he had something better.

As they sat there, they became aware that the moon, risen behind them, was throwing the shadow of a large stone cross between them. Both of them remembered it, and Elisabeth told of it years later. Neither treated it as a magical sign, but both took it as a picture of what they had just agreed: that the cross stood between them, and that whatever happened to their love would happen under it.

No Promises

Soon afterwards Elisabeth graduated and left Wheaton. Jim had another year to go. There was no engagement, and no understanding of the kind that young couples of the time often had. They did not regard themselves as committed to each other. They agreed to write, but even that was a matter of some scruple, and the letters that followed were frequent at some periods and sparse at others. Jim, especially, was careful not to say anything that would bind either of them. Elisabeth, for her part, held herself to her principle that a woman should wait for the man to lead, and she waited.

It is easy, three generations later, to find all this strange, and some readers find it painful. Two young people who loved each other deeply, and who both wanted to marry, chose to live for years with no promise at all, because one of them was not yet sure that marriage was God's will for him. They saw each other only rarely. They went for long periods without knowing whether the story would end in marriage or in a lifetime of separate service. The waiting was hard, and Elisabeth's private writings make clear that she sometimes found it almost unbearable. But neither of them ever suggested that they had been forced into it. They chose it, freely, because they believed that the will of God was worth more than their own happiness, and that if they sought his will first, their happiness would be safe in his hands.

Passion and Purity

Elisabeth Elliot told the story of these years in *Passion and Purity*, published in 1984, nearly thirty years after Jim's death. She drew on her own journals and on his letters, and she wrote it for young Christians struggling with questions of love, sex and the will of God in a culture that had largely abandoned restraint. The book was very widely read, and for many young people it was a lifeline: a picture of a love that was passionate and also chaste, and a reminder that self-control is not the enemy of love but its servant.

Not every reader was persuaded. Some felt that the book made one couple's unusual path into a pattern for everyone, and that readers took from it rules that Scripture does not lay down. Others found its assumptions about the roles of men and women in courtship too rigid. These criticisms deserve a hearing, and they belong to the wider discussion of her teaching, which the companion volume takes up. But the story itself, as a matter of history, is not in dispute. Jim and Elisabeth did what they said they did. They loved each other and laid that love on the altar, and they left it there for a long time.

The verse at the head of this chapter is Paul's appeal to the Romans to present their bodies as a living sacrifice. It is a hard word. It does not speak of a single dramatic offering but of a life laid down continually, day after day. That was the shape of the years that followed the walk in June 1948. The altar was not a moment. It was a place where they had to keep returning.

The Waiting Years

"It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD."
— Lamentations 3:26, KJV

Three Hills

In the autumn of 1948 Elisabeth Howard went north to Canada, to the Prairie Bible Institute at Three Hills, Alberta. It was a long way from Moorestown in every sense. Three Hills was a small farming town on the open plains north-east of Calgary, bitterly cold in winter and remote at any season, and the institute was a large, plain, intensely disciplined Bible school founded in 1922 by L. E. Maxwell, an American who had come to the Canadian prairies as a young man. Maxwell was a preacher of the cross. His great theme was the believer's union with Christ in his death, and the call to die daily to self. His students lived simply, worked hard, rose early, and were expected to take the cost of discipleship with complete seriousness. Many of them went on to the mission field, and the school sent out missionaries all over the world.

Elisabeth went to Prairie for a year of Bible study after her Greek degree, to prepare herself further for missionary work. The austerity of the place, and its stress on self-denial, suited the mood in which she had left Wheaton. She had laid her love on the altar, and she was determined to

leave it there. The year was not easy. She was lonely and far from home, she did not know whether she would ever marry, and the letters from Jim, when they came, were careful and uncommitted. But she worked, and she prayed, and she later counted the year as part of her training.

After the year at the institute she stayed on in Alberta for a time, doing rural Sunday school work among the farms around the hamlet of Patience, and learning what it meant to work far from the support of family and friends. It was, in its way, an apprenticeship for what was to come.

Jim's Road

Meanwhile Jim finished his studies at Wheaton and graduated in 1949. He went home to Portland and spent a good deal of the next two years there, working, studying the Bible, preaching in small churches and assemblies, and seeking God's direction. He was impatient with what he saw as the complacency of American churches, and he was increasingly certain that God was calling him to pioneer missionary work, though for a long time he did not know where.

In the summer of 1950 Jim attended the Summer Institute of Linguistics at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, the training school run by Wycliffe Bible Translators. There he met people with experience of Ecuador, and he heard about the Quichua people of the eastern rainforest and about the Waorani, a people beyond them whom no outsider had yet reached in friendship. Within months he was convinced that God was sending him to Ecuador. He looked for a companion and found one in Pete Fleming, a gifted young man from Seattle with a master's degree in literature, who after much prayer decided to go with him. The two of them prepared for more than a year. On 4 February 1952 they sailed from San Pedro, California, and they reached Ecuador later that month.

None of this made things simpler for Elisabeth. Jim was still not sure about marriage, and he still said so. For a time he seemed to lean towards it and then away again. The two of them met only a handful of times in the four years after Wheaton, and their meetings were often brief and sometimes painful. Their letters, many of which their daughter later published in *Devotedly*, show two people who loved each other and were trying hard to be honest with God and with each other, and who did not always succeed in understanding each other. There were misunderstandings and silences.

A Call of Her Own

Through these years Elisabeth held on to the conviction she had formed at Hampden DuBose and at Wheaton: that God had called her to translate the Scriptures for a people who did not have them. She took the course of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, learning how to analyse the sounds and structure of an unwritten language, how to devise an alphabet for it, and how to begin the slow work of grammar and dictionary from nothing. She was good at it. Her ear and her training in Greek gave her a head start, and she found that the work suited her careful, methodical mind.

The question was where to go. In the end she settled on Ecuador, where there were peoples whose languages had never been written down, and where missionaries already at work were glad of a trained linguist. It is natural to wonder whether she would have chosen Ecuador if Jim had not been going there. The sources do not settle the question, and it may be that she could not have settled it herself. What is clear is that she went with no promise from Jim, no engagement and no understanding, and that she went to do work of her own, independently, as a single missionary. If Jim

had decided in the end to remain single, she would have been a single woman in Ecuador, and she knew it.

She sailed for Ecuador in April 1952 and went up to Quito, the capital, high in the Andes. Jim was there already. He and Pete Fleming were living in the city and studying Spanish before going down to the eastern jungle, and for some months the two of them were in the same city for the first time in years. They saw each other. But they were not engaged, and Jim was not yet ready to say more than he had said before. Elisabeth threw herself into learning Spanish and preparing for her own work, which would take her not east to the jungle but west, down the other side of the Andes, to a different people altogether.

Waiting Well

Elisabeth Elliot later wrote and spoke a great deal about waiting, and about loneliness, and about the temptation to seize what God has not yet given. She knew what she was talking about. The years between 1948 and 1952 were among the hardest of her life, not because anything dramatic happened in them, but because nothing did. She did not know whether she would marry the man she loved. She did not know whether her own calling would bear fruit. She had to go on doing what was in front of her each day, without knowing how any of it would end.

The verse at the head of this chapter comes from the book of Lamentations, written in the ruins of Jerusalem by a man who had lost almost everything. In the middle of his grief he says that it is good to hope and quietly wait for the Lord. Quiet waiting is one of the hardest things God asks of his people. Elisabeth Howard learned it in these years, imperfectly and with many tears, and it was a lesson she would need again.

San Miguel de los Colorados

"And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?"
— Acts 2:8, KJV

Quito

Quito in 1952 was a city of perhaps two hundred thousand people, built in a long valley more than nine thousand feet up in the Andes, ringed by volcanoes and some fifteen miles south of the equator. Its old centre was a maze of steep cobbled streets, whitewashed walls and colonial churches heavy with gold. The air was thin and the sun was fierce, and newcomers from sea level were short of breath for weeks. For a missionary arriving in Ecuador it was the natural place to begin. The government offices were there, the mission headquarters were there, and above all the language schools and teachers were there.

Elisabeth Howard spent her first months in Ecuador in Quito, learning Spanish. It was not the language of the people she had come to serve, but it was the language of the country, of its officials and landowners and traders, and of most of the people she would meet on the edges of the forest. Without it she could not do anything. She worked at it with her usual thoroughness, and her training in languages made the work easier than it was for many. Jim Elliot and Pete Fleming were in the city at the same time,

doing the same thing, and the small missionary community of Quito saw a good deal of the three young Americans. Then, after some months, she left the capital and went west; by the autumn of 1952 she was writing home from the western forest.

The Western Forest

The Andes divide Ecuador into three worlds. In the middle are the high mountain valleys where most of the people then lived. To the east the land falls away into the vast rainforest of the Amazon basin, where Jim was going. To the west it falls, just as steeply, towards the Pacific coast, and on that western slope, below the clouds, there was in those years a belt of dense, wet, tropical forest, cut by rivers and only beginning to be cleared for farms and plantations. A rough road wound down from the mountains into it. At the bottom, many hours' hard travel from Quito, was the small frontier town of Santo Domingo de los Colorados, and not far from it a scattering of clearings and houses called San Miguel de los Colorados.

The names come from the people who lived there. The Spanish called them the Colorados, the red ones, because the men dyed their hair a brilliant red with the paste of the achiote seed and moulded it into a stiff, close cap on their heads. They painted their bodies with black stripes and wore striped cloths about their waists. They call themselves the Tsáchila, and their language is now known as Tsafiki. In 1952 they were a small people, living in houses scattered through the forest rather than in villages, farming their clearings, fishing and hunting. They had been in contact with outsiders for a long time. Their land was being encroached on by settlers from the highlands, and they were wary of strangers. Their language had never been written down.

That was why Elisabeth had come. Three other single women missionaries were working from San Miguel, and she joined them as the linguist of the team. Her task, as she understood it, was to learn the Colorado language from the beginning, to work out its sounds and devise an alphabet, to analyse its grammar, and to lay the foundations for a translation of the Scriptures into it. It was exactly the work for which she had spent eight years preparing, and she went to it with high hopes.

Learning from Nothing

There was no grammar to study, no dictionary to consult and no teacher to explain. The method she had been taught was to begin with the simplest things: to point to an object and write down, as exactly as she could, what was said; to listen to the same word over and over until she could hear its sounds; to record everything in a phonetic script, on slips and cards that could be sorted and resorted; and slowly to build from words to phrases, from phrases to sentences, and from sentences to the patterns underneath. It was meticulous, repetitive and exhausting work. Every guess had to be tested. Every rule had exceptions. Progress was measured in days and weeks, not in hours, and a single misheard sound could lead a whole set of notes astray.

The conditions did not help. It rained a great deal, and the heat and the damp got into everything. There were insects, snakes and mud. The missionaries lived simply in a plain house, and the life was hard on the body and harder on the spirit. The Colorados were courteous but mostly uninterested in what the foreign women had come to say. Relations between Protestant and Roman Catholic missionaries in Ecuador at that time were often tense, and that tension, too, was part of the life of the frontier.

What she needed above all was an informant: a person who spoke the language natively, who could also speak Spanish well enough to explain what the words meant, and who had the patience to sit with a foreigner for hours on end repeating things. Without such a person the work could not go forward. Finding one was not easy. The Colorados who knew Spanish well were few, and those who did had their own work and little reason to spend it with a missionary.

A Death in the Forest

During her months at San Miguel, Elisabeth met the first of the losses that would mark her year there. By her later account, a Colorado woman went into a hard labour, and Elisabeth was there. She was not a nurse, and no doctor was within reach. What help could be given was given, and it was not enough. The woman died.

Elisabeth was shaken to the roots. She had come to Ecuador believing that God had sent her, and that he would bless the work she did in obedience to him. Now she had done her best, in obedience, and a young woman was dead. She did not know what to say to the woman's family, or to God. More than twenty years later, when she came to write about that first year, she did not pretend that she had understood it at the time, or that she understood it fully even then.

The verse at the head of this chapter is the astonished question of the crowd on the day of Pentecost, when they heard the apostles speak the wonderful works of God, every man in his own language. It is the vision behind all Bible translation: that God means to be heard by every people in the tongue in which they were born. Elisabeth went to San Miguel to serve that vision. She had no idea how much it would cost her, or how little, in the end, she would have to show for it.

Macario, and a Stolen Suitcase

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."
— Isaiah 55:8-9, KJV

Don Macario

The informant Elisabeth Howard needed came to her in the person of a man named Macario, to whom she gave, as Ecuadorians did, the courtesy title of Don. Accounts of him differ in detail. By her own account he had grown up on a hacienda alongside Colorado children, and he spoke both Colorado and Spanish with complete ease. That alone made him precious, for people who could move freely between the two languages were very few. But he was more than a bilingual speaker. He was, by her account, a believer in Christ, intelligent and patient, and he was willing to give his time to the work. Elisabeth could hardly have hoped for anyone better.

With Macario at her side the work began to move. Day after day they sat together while she asked and he answered, and she wrote down, tested, sorted and wrote again. Words became lists, lists became patterns, and the patterns began to show the shape of the language underneath. The cards multiplied. She began to see how the sounds of Colorado could be

represented in an alphabet that its own speakers might one day learn to read. She began to work out how its verbs were built and how its sentences were put together. After months of slow and lonely labour, it must have seemed that God was at last confirming the call that had brought her to Ecuador.

A Shot in the Forest

Then Macario was killed. By the account usually given, he was clearing a piece of land he regarded as his own when a group of men arrived and claimed it for one of them; when he refused to give way, he was shot dead. Disputes over land were common on the forest frontier, where settlers from the highlands were pressing in and titles were uncertain, and they were sometimes settled with violence.

The man who had been the key to all her work, and a brother in Christ, had been murdered in a quarrel about a few acres of forest, and there was nothing to be done. There was no one to take his place. The few others who knew both languages could not or would not do what he had done, and the work that had been moving so hopefully came to a halt.

She did not understand it. She had prayed for an informant, and God had given her one, and now God had allowed him to be taken away in the most senseless manner imaginable. She was young, she had given up a great deal to come to Ecuador, and she had done nothing, as far as she could see, but try to obey. If obedience did not guarantee results, what did it guarantee? She asked the question honestly, and she did not find a quick answer.

Another Direction

In the midst of these months her life turned in another direction altogether. In January 1953, in Quito, Jim Elliot at last asked her to marry him, and she accepted. The story of the engagement, and of the condition Jim attached to it, belongs to the next chapter. Its immediate consequence was that Elisabeth would leave San Miguel and the Colorado work and go east, to the other side of the Andes and a different people. The work she had begun in the western forest would have to be left for others to take up, and the fruit of her labour there would be all she could hand on to them.

That fruit was on paper: the notebooks, the files of cards, the charts of sounds and forms, the beginnings of an alphabet and a grammar. It represented the greater part of her months of work, and all that remained of Macario's patient help. She packed it into a suitcase so that it could go on to the colleagues who would carry the work forward, and, as far as the accounts tell, there were no copies.

She never saw it again. Word reached her, by letter, that the suitcase had been stolen from the back of a truck on its way. Whoever took it can have found nothing of value to them in it. Nothing was ever recovered. In a moment, almost everything she had to show for her time among the Colorados was gone.

These Strange Ashes

Elisabeth Elliot did not write about her year at San Miguel until more than twenty years later. When she did, in *These Strange Ashes*, published in 1975, she took her title from a poem by Amy Carmichael, the missionary whose books she had first heard read at Hampden DuBose. The poem asks God about the ashes left when an offering has been burnt, the nothingness and

"this baffling sense of loss", and answers by pointing to Christ's own stripping on the cross, and to ashes as simply what follows when fire falls on a burnt offering. The book tells the story of the year plainly, without heroics and without a tidy ending: the woman who died in childbirth, the murder of Macario, the theft of the suitcase, and the questions they raised.

It was a brave book to publish. By 1975 Elisabeth Elliot was a well-known Christian author and speaker, and many of her readers knew her as the widow who had told the story of 1956 as a story of faith triumphant. Here she wrote, instead, about a year in which she had done what she believed God wanted and had nothing to show for it, and in which God had not explained himself. She did not claim that she had later discovered the hidden reasons. She concluded, rather, that the reasons were God's business, and that the question she had to answer was not why God had done what he did, but whether she would go on trusting him without an explanation. The losses at San Miguel taught her, earlier than most Christians have to learn it, that faith which depends on visible success is not yet faith. Many readers, facing losses of their own that made no sense, have found the book a greater help than any success story.

Her first year as a missionary, then, ended in what looked like failure. She had not translated any Scripture. Her informant was dead, and her work was lost. She was twenty-six, newly engaged, and about to begin again from nothing, with a new language and a new people. It was not the last time that God would take from her the thing on which she had built her hopes, and it was perhaps a preparation for what was to come.

The verse at the head of this chapter is God's word through Isaiah that his thoughts are not our thoughts, nor his ways our ways. It is not an explanation. It is a reminder that no explanation is owed. Elisabeth Howard learned in the western forest to live by that word, and she would need it, in the years ahead, more than she could possibly have imagined.

Quichua First

"Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."
— Ruth 1:16, KJV

Quito, January 1953

Late in January 1953 Jim Elliot came up from the eastern forest to Quito, and Elisabeth came up from the western forest to meet him there. For five years their friendship had moved by inches. There had been the long letters, the careful silences, the meetings that ended without anything being said, and Jim's repeated conviction that he must not ask her for anything until he was sure that God was not calling him to stay single. She had learned to live with that uncertainty, and to work hard while she lived with it.

In Quito Jim asked her to marry him, and she said yes. It was the end of a long road for both of them, and those who later read the letters of those years, edited by their daughter, have been struck by how little either of them presumed on it. Neither treated the engagement as God's reward for having waited. They treated it as a new piece of obedience, with its own costs.

The first of those costs became clear almost at once. Jim did not want them to marry quickly. He was committed to the Quichua people of the eastern forest, the lowland speakers of a language related to the Quechua of the Andes, and he believed that a wife who could not speak to them would

be of little use to the work and would be lonely in it. He asked Elisabeth to learn Quichua first. Only when she could speak it would they set a date.

The Condition

Many readers, meeting this condition for the first time, have found it hard. A man who had kept a woman waiting for five years now asked her to wait again, and to spend the waiting learning a language that was not the one she had come to Ecuador to study. It is fair to say that the arrangement suited Jim's plans more than hers, and that it reflected his strong, sometimes impatient single-mindedness. It is also fair to say that she agreed to it freely, and that she never afterwards described it as a grievance. She was a trained linguist. She knew better than he did how long it takes to learn a language well, and how easily a missionary can live for years among a people while understanding very little of what they say. If she was to share his work, she wanted to share it properly.

Agreeing to Jim's condition meant leaving San Miguel. The previous chapter has told how her months among the Colorado people ended in loss. It is enough to say here that she went east into a new language and a new people knowing that the same thing could happen again, and that the Colorado work was left to the colleagues who stayed.

A New Language

Lowland Quichua was a different proposition from Colorado. It was not an unwritten language in quite the same sense. Missionaries and Catholic priests had worked with Quechua speakers for centuries, and there were word lists, some grammar and some Scripture in the highland forms of the language. But the forest dialect of the Napo region had its own sounds and

words, and much of what had been written did not fit it. A learner had to listen, write down what she heard, test it on the people, and correct herself again and again. Elisabeth had been trained to do exactly that. Early in the summer of 1953 she moved to the mission station at Dos Ríos, in the eastern forest, worked with Quichua helpers there, and set about making the language her own.

The sources do not record every move she made in these months, and this book does not try to supply them. What is clear is that she spent the rest of 1953 in the eastern forest among the Quichua, with other missionaries close by and with Jim sometimes near and often not. He was busy. Shandia, the station he and Pete Fleming had taken over, was largely swept away when the river beside it flooded in the summer of 1953, and the months that followed went into rebuilding and into the school and the preaching that the Shandia believers depended on. Ed McCully and his wife Marilou had also joined the Quichua work, and the small team of young missionaries was stretched thin.

Her letters from these months, published long afterwards, show her doing what she did all her life: working steadily, observing closely, and recording her own failures without self-pity. She learned the language quickly by most standards. That did not make the learning easy. Every new word cost her hours of listening, and she was learning it in heat and damp, often unwell, among people whose ways she was only beginning to understand. She seems also to have been learning something about herself. For years she had been the one waiting for Jim to decide. Now the timing of the marriage depended largely on her own diligence, and she could not afford to coast.

What She Was Choosing

It would be easy to tell the story of 1953 as a romantic interlude, a year of waiting before a wedding. It was more serious than that. In accepting Jim's condition, Elisabeth was choosing not only a husband but a people and a place, and a way of life that she knew would be hard. She was choosing to put aside, at least for a time, the work she had trained for, the translation of an unwritten language from nothing, and to give herself to work in which others had already broken the ground. She was choosing to live in the forest rather than in the town, among people she had not chosen, in the service of a calling that had first been his.

She did not do so as a woman without convictions of her own. She had come to Ecuador independently. She had worked as a single missionary, and she would remain, all her life, sharply resistant to the idea that a woman's faith was merely an appendage of her husband's. But she also believed that God led through ordinary circumstances, including the circumstance of loving a particular man, and that a choice freely made could be a way of obeying him. She did not think the two convictions were in conflict.

The verse at the head of this chapter comes from the book of Ruth. Ruth was a widow from Moab who refused to leave her mother-in-law, and who went with her to a country she did not know. Her words have often been read at weddings, though they were spoken by one woman to another, and spoken in grief. They suit this chapter in both senses. In 1953 Elisabeth Howard was learning to say to a people, as well as to a man, that their people would be hers. She could not know that within three years she would be a widow herself, and that she would have to decide again, alone, whether she meant it.

8 October 1953

"Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour."
— Ecclesiastes 4:9, KJV

A Wedding Without Fuss

By the autumn of 1953 Elisabeth had learned enough Quichua to satisfy Jim, and they set the date. They were married in Quito on Thursday 8 October 1953, which was Jim's twenty-sixth birthday. It was a civil ceremony, conducted in Spanish at the government registry office, as Ecuadorian law required of every marriage. There was no church service afterwards, no procession and no reception of the kind their families at home might have expected. A handful of friends from the missionary community in Quito were present, and the whole affair was brief.

Some who hear this for the first time assume that the young couple were too poor or too remote to do anything more. That was not the reason. Both of them disliked show, and Jim in particular seems to have had little patience with what he saw as the fuss of the conventional church wedding. He had grown up among the Brethren in Portland, where ceremony was distrusted. Elisabeth, for her part, had been raised in a home where family worship mattered far more than occasions, and she seems to have been content. Whatever others thought, the two people most concerned were

satisfied that they had been married before God and the law, and that nothing essential had been left out.

Their families were thousands of miles away and could not be there. Letters went north to Moorestown and to Portland. Both families learned of the wedding at a distance, as missionary families of that generation often did, and had to be content with letters and, later, photographs.

Panama

After the wedding they went away together for a short honeymoon, travelling north to Panama. Some accounts add a few days in Costa Rica. It was brief. By the late autumn they were back in Ecuador and on their way east to the forest.

It is worth pausing on what they brought to the marriage. Jim was intense, energetic and outspoken, a gifted preacher, a wrestler at college, a man who loved the outdoors and could be impatient with people who did not share his urgency. He was also warm, funny and deeply affectionate, and his journals show a man who could be very hard on himself. Elisabeth was more reserved, more analytical, and more inclined to see the difficulties in any plan. She had a sharp wit and could be blunt, and she was not afraid to disagree with him. Friends who knew them both have described a marriage of real affection and real equality of mind, if not of temperament. Each sharpened the other. Each sometimes exasperated the other. Neither was the plaster saint that the later legend made of them.

Elisabeth herself, many years later, was firm on this point. In her books and talks she discouraged readers from imagining that she and Jim had enjoyed a perfect marriage, or that their love story was a pattern that God would simply repeat for anyone who waited long enough. She had been married to Jim for twenty-seven months. They had been, by her account,

happy months, but they had been ordinary ones too, full of the small irritations and adjustments of two strong-willed people learning to live in one small house.

The First Home

That small house was not yet built. When they reached the eastern forest at the end of 1953, the Shandia station was still being rebuilt after the flood, and the newly married Elliots did not move straight into it. Instead they went to Puyupungu, a Quichua settlement to the south of Shandia, where a local headman named Atanasio had asked for a missionary to teach his people and to start a school for their children. The Elliots set up house in a tent while a simple building was put up. It was an unpromising start to married life. The forest was wet, the insects were relentless, and every meal had to be cooked over a fire or on a small stove. They seem to have enjoyed it.

At Puyupungu Elisabeth had her first real test as a speaker of Quichua. The work was not hers alone or even mainly hers. Jim preached, taught and organised the school; she looked after the household, helped with simple medical care, and worked on the language. But she now had to use what she had learned, every day, in front of people who would laugh at her mistakes, and she did. The months of study in 1953 had not been wasted.

The Puyupungu arrangement did not last long. In June 1954 Pete Fleming married Olive Ainslie, the girl he had left behind in Seattle, and after a period of language study the new couple took up the work at Puyupungu. The Elliots moved back north to Shandia, where Jim built them a house on the rebuilt station. Shandia was to be their home for the rest of their married life.

Two Are Better

The verse at the head of this chapter comes from Ecclesiastes. The Preacher, who distrusts nearly every human achievement, makes an exception for companionship. Two are better than one, he says, because they have a good reward for their labour. It is a modest verse and an unromantic one. It makes no promises about feelings. It simply observes, as the next verse goes on to say, that if one falls the other can lift him up: work is easier, and burdens lighter, when they are shared.

Their gifts fitted together in just that way. Jim had picked up Quichua largely by ear and by use, talking with the schoolboys and the men of Shandia, and he spoke it with an ease that people warmed to. Elisabeth came to it as a trained linguist, listening for the patterns beneath the words, and she was better placed than he was to write it down, to teach others to read it, and in time to put Scripture into it. He was the preacher; she was the one with the notebook. Neither could have done the other's work as well, and both knew it. The partnership was not always smooth, but it was a real one.

That was the shape of the Elliots' marriage. They did not marry in order to be happy, though they were. They married in order to do together a work that each had already committed to doing alone, and they believed that God had joined them for that purpose. The marriage that began in a registry office in Quito, with no music and no flowers, was a working partnership as much as a love match, and it was both. Elisabeth would spend much of the rest of her life insisting that these were not opposites, and that obedience and affection, rightly ordered, belonged together. She had learned it in Ecuador, in a tent at Puyupungu, in the first year of being married to Jim.

Shandia

"How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?"
— Romans 10:14, KJV

A Station in the Forest

Shandia lay in the forest of the upper Napo, on the eastern side of the Andes, among the Quichua people whose language Elisabeth had spent 1953 learning. It had been begun some years earlier by an older British missionary, Dr Wilfred Tidmarsh, and Jim and Pete Fleming had come to it in 1952 to carry the work on. In the summer of 1953 disaster struck, when the river rose and carried away much of the station. By the time the Elliots settled there as a married couple in 1954, the buildings had been put back on higher ground, and Jim had built a house for his wife.

Life at Shandia was simple by American standards and comfortable by the standards of the forest. There was a house with a roof that kept out the rain, a kitchen, a short-wave radio for the daily contact with the other stations, and, not far off, the small plane flown by the missionary pilot Nate Saint from his base at Shell Mera on the edge of the mountains, which was the station's quickest link with the outside world. Supplies came by air or

on the backs of carriers. The nearest town was a long walk away. The forest pressed close on every side, and the river was both the road and the danger.

The heart of the station was the school. Jim had inherited from Tidmarsh a school for Quichua boys, and he gave a great deal of himself to it. He taught reading and the Bible, and spent hours simply talking with the boys and their fathers. Out of the school came the first members of a small Quichua church. Jim preached in Quichua on Sundays and at other times through the week, and by the time of his death there was a group of young believers at Shandia who met together, prayed and read what Scripture they had in their own language. Some of them would carry on the work after he was gone.

Her Share of the Work

Elisabeth's share of the work was less visible and, in the long run, perhaps as important. She ran the household, and in the forest that alone was a heavy task. She gave simple medical care to the people who came to the house with fevers, wounds, snakebites and infections, and she learned, as every missionary wife in such places learned, to act as nurse and sometimes as midwife with very little training. She taught women and girls. Above all she worked on the language. As a linguist she was better equipped than anyone else on the team to analyse Quichua, to prepare reading materials, and to work on the translation of portions of the New Testament. How much of it lasted is hard to say; like most first efforts of its kind, it was the sort of work that later translators build on, revise and sometimes replace.

It was not glamorous work, and she did not pretend it was. Her later books are full of plain descriptions of the routine of missionary life: the endless small tasks, the repetitions, the times when nothing seemed to be happening at all. She had come to the mission field with a picture of what it

would be like, and the reality was more tedious and more ordinary than the picture. She learned at Shandia a lesson she would teach for the rest of her life, that faithfulness is mostly made up of the unremarkable duty that lies to hand, done well and offered to God, whether or not anyone notices.

Valerie

On 27 February 1955 the Elliots' only child was born, a daughter, whom they named Valerie. Jim was delighted with her, and the letters and photographs of that year show a proud and affectionate father. For Elisabeth, motherhood in the forest added a new layer of work and a new kind of anxiety. There were few doctors and no hospitals near at hand, and the illnesses that came and went among the Quichua children could be deadly. She and Jim did what other missionary parents did. They took sensible precautions, prayed, and accepted that they could not control everything.

Valerie was ten months old when her father was killed. She was far too young to remember him, and she came to know him through her mother's memories, through his journals and letters, and through the people who had known him. In her later years she edited and published her parents' letters, which has given readers a much fuller picture of the marriage than the earlier books allowed.

The People Beyond the River

From his first months in Ecuador, Jim had heard about another people. To the south and east of the Quichua country, between the Napo and the Curaray rivers, lived a small and isolated group whom the Quichua feared. They had no contact with the outside world except through violence. Over

the previous decades they had killed outsiders who came into their territory, including rubber workers, settlers and, in the 1940s, men working for the Shell oil company. They had killed Quichua as well. They also killed one another: later research suggests that a large share of the deaths among them were the result of spearings in long-running feuds. Outsiders called them by a Quichua word meaning savages. Their own name for themselves was Waorani, which means simply the people.

Jim was drawn to them almost from the beginning. He had long believed that his calling was to go where no one had gone with the gospel, and here was a people who had never heard it. Ed McCully, who had moved with Marilou to an old oil company base at Arajuno, on the edge of Waorani country, shared his interest, and so did Nate Saint. The verse at the head of this chapter is Paul's question to the church at Rome: how shall they hear without a preacher? It was a question these young men took personally.

Elisabeth knew how Jim felt, and she knew what the risks were. In her own account she does not pretend that she was indifferent to them or that she found them easy to accept. But she did not try to dissuade him. She believed, as he did, that the Waorani needed to hear of Christ, and she had married a man whose readiness to go was part of what she loved in him. She had also learned at San Miguel that God did not promise success or safety to those who served him. In September 1955, when Nate Saint and Ed McCully, flying over the forest, finally spotted a cluster of Waorani houses, the decision that would change her life had, in a sense, already been made.

Palm Beach

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."
— John 12:24, KJV

The Gift Drops

Five men took part in the attempt to reach the Waorani. Jim Elliot and Pete Fleming were working among the Quichua. Ed McCully was at Arajuno, the nearest station to Waorani country. Roger Youderian, a former army paratrooper who had fought in the Second World War, was working among the Shuar people in the south-east. Nate Saint, the pilot of Mission Aviation Fellowship, flew for all of them from Shell Mera. Each of the five was married, and four of them had young children. The name they gave the plan, Operation Auca, used the Quichua word for savage that was then the only name most outsiders had for the Waorani, a word the Waorani have rightly resented.

After the first sighting of Waorani houses in September 1955, the men began a programme of gift drops. Nate had worked out a way of lowering a bucket on a long line from a plane flying in tight circles, so that it hung almost still over a single spot on the ground. Week after week, from early October, he and Ed, and later the others, flew over the houses and let down

machetes, cooking pots, cloth, beads and other gifts. They shouted phrases in the Waorani language through a loudspeaker. Jim had learned the phrases from Dayuma, a young Waorani woman who had fled her people some years before and was working on a hacienda in the foothills; it later became clear that they had been learned imperfectly. After a while the Waorani began to tie gifts of their own to the line: a feathered headband, food and other small things. To the men in the plane it looked like friendship.

They kept the plan almost entirely secret. They were afraid that publicity would bring others, the government or the press into Waorani country and wreck any chance of a peaceful contact, and they did not want to be talked out of it. Their wives knew. Most of their colleagues did not. Rachel Saint, Nate's sister, who was learning the language from Dayuma at the hacienda, was not told. The secrecy has been questioned since, by historians and by some who knew the men, as has the speed with which the plan went forward. At the time, it seemed to the men the only way to proceed.

The Sandbar

On Tuesday 3 January 1956 Nate landed the plane on a sandbar on the Curaray river, a few miles from the Waorani houses, and over several flights brought in Jim, Ed and Roger with their supplies. The men built a shelter in a tree above the beach and called the place Palm Beach. Pete flew in and out with Nate, and at first the two of them spent their nights at Arajuno. For three days the men waited, called out their phrases towards the forest, and saw no one.

On Friday 6 January three Waorani came out on the far bank of the river: a young man, a young woman, and an older woman. They waded

across and spent most of the day with the missionaries. They were given gifts and food, and the men photographed them. The young man was taken up in the plane and flown over the houses of his own people. The missionaries gave him and the young woman nicknames. Years later their names became known: the young man was Nenkiwi, the young woman Gimari, and the older woman Mintaka, who will appear again in this story. Towards evening the visitors drifted away. The older woman seems to have stayed on the beach after the others had gone. The men were elated. On Saturday no one came.

Sunday 8 January

On the morning of Sunday 8 January, Nate flew over the Waorani settlement and saw what he took to be a group of men walking towards the beach. Shortly after noon he spoke by radio to his wife Marj at Shell Mera, told her they expected visitors that afternoon, and promised to call again at half past four. When that time came, the radio from Palm Beach was silent. It never spoke again.

What happened that afternoon could only be pieced together years later, from the testimony of Waorani who were there, and the accounts do not agree in every particular. The outline is reasonably clear. Nenkiwi had gone off with Gimari without the older woman who should have accompanied them, and to deflect anger from himself he told his kinsmen that the foreigners had attacked them. The Waorani already believed that outsiders were dangerous, and some believed they ate people. A group of men, led by an older warrior named Gikita, decided to kill the strangers. Among them were Kimo, Mincaye, Dyuwi and Nampa, a brother of Dayuma. While women showed themselves across the river to draw the missionaries' attention, the men came at them with spears.

The five had guns, and they had agreed beforehand that they would not use them against the Waorani. Most accounts say that shots were fired, but into the air or to frighten, not to kill. It seems that one bullet struck Nampa, probably by accident; whether that wound contributed to his death some time later is disputed. The precise order of events, who was speared first, and whether any of the five tried to reach the radio or the plane, cannot now be known with certainty, and this book does not try to reconstruct it. Nate Saint's watch was later found stopped at a little after three o'clock. All five men died on the beach or in the river. The Waorani tore the fabric from the plane and went home.

No Fool

Six years earlier, a few months after leaving Wheaton, Jim Elliot had written in his journal on 28 October 1949 a sentence that has since been quoted more often than anything else he wrote: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." He had written it as a young man testing his own heart, not as an epitaph. Elisabeth later made it known to the world, and it has been printed on posters and bookmarks and in sermons ever since. It is worth reading it in the light of what actually happened, rather than in the glow of the legend. Jim did not know, when he wrote it, that he would die young, and on the sandbar he did not expect to die at all. The five men went in hope, not in search of martyrdom. What the sentence describes is not a plan for dying but a settled choice about what to hold loosely.

The verse at the head of this chapter is Christ's own word about his death. A grain of wheat that is not buried remains a single grain; buried, it bears much fruit. The five men had read it many times. On the afternoon of 8 January 1956 they became, without choosing the hour or the manner,

an instance of it. Whether the fruit would come, and what shape it would take, was hidden from everyone who waited that evening by the silent radios at Shell Mera and Arajuno. It was hidden most of all from Elisabeth.

The Widow at Shandia

"A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation."
— Psalm 68:5, KJV

The Waiting

On the evening of Sunday 8 January 1956 the silence from Palm Beach could still be explained. Radios failed in the forest, batteries ran down, men forgot the time. By Monday morning it could not. Johnny Keenan, the other Mission Aviation Fellowship pilot in Ecuador, flew out over the Curaray and found the little yellow plane on the sandbar with its fabric stripped away. There was no sign of the men. The news went out on the missionary radio network, and the wives gathered at Shell Mera to wait.

The days that followed have been told many times, by Elisabeth among others, and the details need not be repeated at length here. A ground party set out overland towards the Curaray, led by Frank Drown, a missionary colleague of Roger Youderian's, with other missionaries, Quichua men and Ecuadorian soldiers. The United States military sent aircraft and helicopters from the Panama Canal Zone to help. As the week went on, the bodies of four of the men were found in the river near the beach and identified, by their watches, wedding rings and other belongings. A fifth body, almost certainly Ed McCully's, had been seen and examined earlier by a party of

Quichua further downstream, but it could not afterwards be recovered. Late in the week the search party buried the four men together in a single grave at the edge of the beach, below the house in the tree, in the middle of a violent rainstorm, and then withdrew in haste, afraid of being attacked themselves.

The wives stayed at Shell Mera through it all. They cooked for the searchers, listened to the radio, looked after their children and waited for confirmation of what most of them already believed. When it came, the reports of those who were present agree that they received it with a composure that astonished the outsiders. Among those outsiders was the photographer Cornell Capa, who had flown in on assignment for *Life* magazine and who went out with the search party. His photographs, published later that month, showed the world the five widows and their children, and made their faces famous.

What Composure Meant

It is important to be careful here. The widows' calm was real, and it came from a real faith. But it was later turned into something it was not: a picture of women who did not grieve, or who grieved less than others because they believed more. Elisabeth spent much of her later life correcting that impression. She did grieve, deeply and for a long time. She knew loneliness, exhaustion and fear. She had questions that were not answered. What she did not do was conclude that God had failed or abandoned her, and in that sense her calm was not an absence of grief but a decision about where to take it.

She was twenty-nine. Valerie was ten months old. Elisabeth had been married to Jim for a little over two years, and it was eight years since the winter at Wheaton when they had begun to study Greek together. She had

no husband, no settled income beyond what friends and churches at home chose to send, and no obligation to stay in Ecuador. Most people expected her to go home.

Back to Shandia

She went back to Shandia. Before long she had returned, with Valerie, to the house Jim had built, and taken up the Quichua work that he had left. She did not see this as a heroic gesture. As she explained it, the work was there, the people were there, the language was one she could speak, and there was no one else to do it. The small church at Shandia, the schoolboys who had become young believers, the families in the surrounding settlements, all still needed teaching. It seemed to her simply the obvious next thing.

That phrase was to become her watchword. Years later she would often quote an anonymous old poem, its spelling as quaint as its date, whose refrain was "Doe the nexte thynge." It counselled a troubled soul not to look too far ahead, but to take up the duty immediately in front of it and to leave the rest to God. Her return to Shandia was the thing it described. She did not have to solve the meaning of Jim's death before going back to work. She had only to do what was in front of her.

The other widows made their own choices, and Elisabeth never suggested that hers was the only faithful one. Olive Fleming, who had been married less than two years and had no children, returned to the United States. Marilou McCully, who was expecting her third child, went home to the United States for the birth, and later returned to work in Quito. Marj Saint moved to Quito and stayed in Ecuador for some years. Barbara Youderian remained for a time among the Shuar in the south-east, carrying

on the work she and Roger had shared. Each of them had to rebuild a life, and each did it differently.

A House With a Gap in It

Life at Shandia without Jim was harder than anything Elisabeth had known. She now carried the whole of the station's work: the teaching, the medical care, the language, the correspondence, the household and a baby. She had the help of the Quichua believers, some of whom took on more responsibility in the church, and of colleagues on the other stations. Nate's replacement pilots kept the supplies coming. But the house had a gap in it, and the evenings were long. Valerie gave her both a reason to keep going and a daily reminder of what had been lost. The child learned to walk and to talk in the house her father had built, watched over by a mother who now had to be everything to her, and surrounded by Quichua neighbours for whom a fatherless child was nothing unusual.

She also had something new to deal with. The story of the five men had gone round the world, and letters began to arrive at Shandia in great numbers from strangers who had been moved by it. Many of them wrote to say that they had given their lives to God, or to missionary work, because of what they had read. Others asked questions she could not answer. She replied to as many as she could. And she was asked, almost at once, to write the story herself.

The verse at the head of this chapter is from Psalm 68. God, says the psalmist, is a father to the fatherless and a judge, a defender, of widows. It is a promise she clung to in those months, and she would later say, often and plainly, that she had found it true. She was never sentimental about widowhood. She knew it was a loss and not a calling, and she would know it twice. But she found that God kept his word, not by removing the loss,

but by being present in it, day after day, at Shandia, while she did the next thing.

Through Gates of Splendor

"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh."
— Hebrews 11:4, KJV

Asked to Write

Within weeks of the deaths on the Curaray, the story of the five men had been told to millions. *Life* magazine's photo essay, built around Cornell Capa's pictures of the widows and the search and around photographs the men had taken themselves on the beach, appeared at the end of January 1956. Newspapers, magazines and radio programmes followed. Churches across the United States held memorial services. Many accounts were hurried, and some were inaccurate. It was soon clear that someone who had known the men, and who could write, should tell the story properly. The obvious person was Elisabeth.

She agreed, and she worked quickly. She had at her disposal the men's own diaries and letters, the notes Nate Saint had kept on the gift flights, the photographs, the recollections of the other widows and of the colleagues who had flown and searched, and her own memory. The book was written in the course of 1956, and it was published in 1957 by Harper and Brothers in New York under the title *Through Gates of Splendor*.

The cost of that work is easy to pass over. To write the book she had to read, in the first months of her widowhood, page after page of her husband's private journals and letters, and to reconstruct hour by hour the weeks that had ended in his death. She had to weigh what to include about four other families, each with its own grief, and to write about men she had known well without either flattering them or exposing them. She did it while still carrying the ordinary load of a mother and a missionary.

The title came from a hymn. Before the men left for the Curaray they had sung together "We Rest on Thee", a hymn by Edith Gilling Cherry, a young Englishwoman who had died in 1897, set to the tune of Sibelius's *Finlandia*. Its last verse looks forward to the day when believers, passing through the gates of pearly splendour, rest with Christ for ever. Elisabeth took her title from that line. It placed the deaths of the five men where they themselves would have placed them, in the hope of the resurrection.

The Book

Readers who come to *Through Gates of Splendor* today, expecting a pious tribute, are often surprised by it. It is a plain, factual, carefully restrained book. Elisabeth told the story chronologically, from the five men's backgrounds and callings to their deaths and the search, and she let their own words, from their journals and letters, carry much of the weight. She described the gift flights and the days on the beach in detail, and she did not linger on the horror of the end. She did not preach. She did not claim to know why God had allowed it, and she did not claim that the story was finished. The book ends not with an explanation but with the conviction that God was sovereign over what had happened, and with the work still to be done.

The restraint was deliberate. She was a writer of unusual clarity, trained in Greek and in close reading, and she had a strong dislike of overstatement. That dislike would grow stronger over the years. But even in 1957, writing in grief and under pressure, she was trying to tell the truth, not to produce a legend.

The book's effect was enormous. It sold in great numbers, was translated into many languages, and has remained in print ever since. It made the five men known throughout the evangelical world and far beyond it. Over the following decades thousands of people, many of them students, said that reading it had led them to offer themselves for missionary service. Mission agencies spoke of a wave of new volunteers. For a generation of American evangelicals, the five men on the sandbar became the very picture of costly obedience, and Elisabeth became, without seeking it, one of the best-known Christian women in the world.

Shadow of the Almighty

The following year, 1958, she published a second book, devoted to Jim alone. *Shadow of the Almighty* took its title from the first verse of the ninety-first psalm, which speaks of abiding under the shadow of the Almighty. It told Jim's life from his boyhood in Portland to his death, and it drew heavily on his journals and letters. In it readers met for the first time the young man who had written, a few months after leaving Wheaton, the sentence about giving what one cannot keep. They also met a young man who was intense, idealistic, sometimes self-absorbed, often hard on himself and on others, and very much in love with God.

It was a remarkable thing for a widow of barely thirty to do. She was presenting to the world the private writings of the husband she had lost, with all their fervour and all their immaturity, and she chose not to tidy

them up into something more edifying. Some of what Jim wrote as a student reads, to an older eye, as earnest and even naïve. She let it stand. She trusted readers to see the man as he was, growing in grace, not yet finished. *Shadow of the Almighty* became, like the first book, a classic of its kind, and Jim's journals, which she later edited in fuller form as *The Journals of Jim Elliot* (1978), have continued to be read.

A Story She Kept Correcting

There is an irony in the success of these two books, and Elisabeth felt it more and more as the years went by. She had written them to tell the truth plainly. But the story they told was taken up by others and made into something simpler and more triumphant: a tale of heroes and savages, of martyrdom followed swiftly by mass conversion, of a happy ending guaranteed. She came to dislike that version intensely. She knew that the men's planning was open to honest question, that the motives on the Waorani side were complicated and human, and that what followed among the Waorani was neither as quick nor as clear as the legend claimed. When *Through Gates of Splendor* was reissued in 1996 for the fortieth anniversary, she added an epilogue saying so, and declining to give the story a neater ending than God had. That later honesty, and what it cost her, belongs to a later chapter.

The verse at the head of this chapter speaks of Abel, the first man in the Bible to die, of whom the writer to the Hebrews says that being dead he yet speaks. The five men spoke after their deaths largely because Elisabeth gave them a voice. She did it with care, at real personal cost, and with a reticence that the people who retold the story did not always share. Her two books are, in a sense, the first expression of a conviction that would govern her

whole writing life: that the truth about suffering, told without decoration, is more useful to faith than any legend.

Mintaka and Mankamu

"And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."
— Isaiah 42:16, KJV

Dayuma

The way back to the Waorani, when it opened, did not come through any plan of the missionaries. It came through three Waorani women.

The first of them was Dayuma. She had grown up among her people at a time of especially savage feuding, and some years before the events at Palm Beach, after members of her family had been killed, she had fled the forest. She found refuge among the Quichua and eventually came to work, in conditions close to servitude, on a hacienda in the foothills owned by a landowner named Carlos Sevilla. There she learned Quichua and some Spanish, and lived a life cut off from her own people, whom she believed she could never safely rejoin. It was there that Jim had gone to learn his handful of Waorani phrases from her, and there that Rachel Saint, Nate's sister, a missionary with the Wycliffe Bible Translators and their Summer Institute of Linguistics, had been living for some time, learning the Waorani language from her.

After the deaths of the five men, Rachel's work with Dayuma took on a new importance in the eyes of evangelicals at home. In 1957 Rachel took Dayuma to the United States. There the two women appeared before very large audiences, including the American television programme *This Is Your Life* and Billy Graham's crusade at Madison Square Garden in New York. During these months Dayuma professed faith in Christ. For many American Christians she became the living sign that the story of Palm Beach would have a happy ending. The attention was intense, and some who knew both women later wondered whether it had been good for either of them.

Two Women on the Curaray

Elisabeth was not part of any of this. In November 1957 she was at Arajuno, the station on the edge of Waorani country that had been Ed McCully's, when two Quichua men came in from the Curaray with startling news. Two Waorani women had come out of the forest and were at their house. Elisabeth went at once.

The women were Mankamu and Mintaka. They were older women, by most accounts kin of Dayuma, and they had walked out of their own territory into the Quichua country for reasons of their own, which outsiders never fully understood. Some accounts say they hoped to find out what had become of Dayuma, and that the feuding and grief among their own people had made them willing to risk the world outside. Mintaka was the older woman who had visited the five missionaries on the sandbar on 6 January 1956, less than two years before. She had seen them alive on the last Friday of their lives.

Elisabeth took the two women back with her to Shandia, and for the next ten months they lived with her and Valerie there. It was an

extraordinary arrangement, and it was entered into without fuss. She gave them food and shelter and whatever care they needed, and they gave her, without quite intending to, what she most needed if she was ever to reach their people: the language. Day after day she listened to them, wrote down what she heard, and tried to make sense of it.

A Language Like No Other

It was the hardest linguistic task of her life. The Waorani language is unrelated to any other known language. It has nothing in common with Quichua or Spanish, and none of the ordinary aids to learning existed: no grammar, no dictionary, no other speaker to compare notes with except Rachel and Dayuma, who were far away in the United States. Elisabeth had to work out its sounds, its words and its structure from scratch, from two women who had never been asked to explain their language to anyone and who could not read or write. She did so with the methods she had learned at the Summer Institute of Linguistics and practised among the Colorados. Progress was slow, and every misunderstanding was a reminder of how little she knew.

The two women were not specimens or informants to her, nor were they simply converts in waiting. She came to know them as people, with their own humour, sorrows and opinions, and with their own way of seeing the strange world into which they had come. Her later writing about the Waorani is notable for its refusal either to romanticise them as noble innocents or to describe them as monsters. She had learned that refusal, in part, from living with Mintaka and Mankamu at Shandia.

The Three Go Home

In 1958 Rachel Saint and Dayuma returned to Ecuador. Dayuma met the two women from her own people, the first she had seen in more than ten years, and the three of them began to talk of going home together. On 3 September 1958, by the date usually given, Dayuma, Mintaka and Mankamu walked into the forest. Those left behind did not know whether they would see them again, or what reception the women would meet.

They came back about three weeks later, to Arajuno, where Elisabeth was waiting for them. With them came a party of Waorani, men and women, accounts differ on the number. They brought news that Dayuma's people were alive, that they had heard what the three women had to say about the foreigners outside, and that they were willing to receive visitors. More than that, they brought an invitation. Elisabeth and Rachel were asked to come and live among them.

It was the moment that Jim and his friends had prayed for, and it had come in a way none of them could have planned. Not a plane and a loudspeaker, but a widow who had taken two women into her home, and an exile who had come back with news of her own. Elisabeth did not pretend, then or later, that she understood fully what God was doing. But she could see that a door had opened, and she had spent her life believing that when God opened a door the right response was to walk through it.

The verse at the head of this chapter is from Isaiah. God promises to lead the blind by a way they do not know, along paths they have not travelled, and to make crooked things straight. None of the people in this chapter could see far ahead: not the two Waorani women who walked out of the forest, not the exile on the hacienda, not the widow at Shandia. But the paths converged. In October 1958 Elisabeth Elliot, with her three-year-old daughter, set out to live among the people who had killed her husband.

Into the Forest

"Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."
— Romans 12:21, KJV

A Reckless Decision?

Not everyone thought Elisabeth should go. To many of her friends and relatives at home, the idea of a young widow taking a three-year-old child to live among the people who had speared her husband, less than three years before, seemed reckless to the point of folly. The Waorani had killed outsiders for generations. They had killed one another more often still. No one could guarantee that the invitation brought by the three women was meant by everyone in the group, or that it would be honoured if something went wrong. If Elisabeth were killed, Valerie would be an orphan. If Valerie were killed, it was hard to imagine what anyone would say.

Elisabeth weighed all this. She did not dismiss the danger, and she did not claim any special assurance that she would be kept safe. Her reasoning, as she later set it out, was simpler. The Waorani had asked her to come. She was one of the very few outsiders who had begun to learn their language. She believed that God had called her to make Christ known to people who had never heard of him, and these were such people. The risks were real, but they were not greater than the risks Jim had accepted, and she did not

think that being a mother released her from obedience. She also did not think that obedience guaranteed a good outcome. She went anyway.

Those who have praised her for this decision have sometimes made it sound like an act of dramatic forgiveness, a widow going in search of her husband's killers in order to love them. She did not describe it that way. She did not go as a widow on a mission of reconciliation. She went as a missionary to a people, and the fact that some of that people had killed Jim was, in her own telling, part of the situation rather than the point of it. Forgiveness was real and necessary, but it was not a performance. It was simply the condition of going at all.

The Clearing

Early in October 1958 Elisabeth, Valerie and Rachel Saint set out from the edge of the Quichua country with Dayuma and the Waorani who had come out to fetch them. The journey was made on foot through the forest. It was hard going for the adults and harder for a small child, who had to be carried. On 8 October 1958, by the date usually given, they reached the Waorani clearing beside a small river called the Tiwaeno, from which the settlement took its name. It was, as it happened, the day Jim would have turned thirty-one, and the fifth anniversary of their wedding.

The houses were large shelters thatched with palm leaves, with hammocks slung inside. The people grew manioc and plantains in clearings cut from the forest, hunted monkeys and birds with blowguns and spears, and fished in the rivers. They wore almost nothing. Most of them had never seen a foreigner close at hand, let alone a fair-haired child.

Elisabeth and Valerie lived as the Waorani did, in a simple thatched shelter, and Rachel lived close by. The Waorani gave Elisabeth a name:

Gikari, which means woodpecker. Valerie began to pick up Waorani from the children she played with.

The bridge between the two worlds was Dayuma. She was home among her own kin after more than a decade away, and she was the only person in the clearing who could move easily between the Waorani and the foreigners. She began, in her own way, to tell her people the Bible stories she had learned, using for God the name Waengongi, the creator of Waorani tradition. Neither Elisabeth nor Rachel could yet speak well enough to do the same. In those first months the two outsiders depended on Dayuma for translation, for explanation of what they saw, and to a large degree for their own safety.

The Men

Among the people of the clearing were men who had been on the beach on 8 January 1956. Elisabeth met them in the first days. Gikita, the older man who had led the attack, was there. So were Kimo and Dyuwi, younger men, and Mincaye, who in later years would become the best known of them to the outside world through his friendship with Nate Saint's son Steve. Nampa, Dayuma's brother, had died since. Most of the men who had killed Jim were living within a few yards of his widow and his daughter.

What she felt on meeting them she later described with characteristic restraint. She did not claim to have felt nothing, and she did not claim to have felt only love. What struck her, again and again, was how ordinary they were. They were not monsters. They laughed, joked, quarrelled, cared for their children, mourned their dead, and went hunting. They had killed the five men, as they had killed many others, out of fear and anger and a long habit of violence, and in time they spoke of it plainly, as a thing that had happened. They had believed the foreigners were dangerous. They had

been told that the foreigners had attacked their own people. In their world, killing those who threatened you was simply what one did.

She did not excuse what they had done. She did not pretend that it did not matter. But she also did not hate them. She had settled that question before she came. Now she had to live with it, day after day, at close quarters, in their houses and at their fires, while she tried to learn to speak to them.

Overcoming Evil

The verse at the head of this chapter is Paul's command at the end of the twelfth chapter of Romans: be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. It is one of the hardest commands in the New Testament. Elisabeth did not claim to have kept it perfectly, and she would have been impatient with anyone who made her into a symbol of it. But the facts are plain. In October 1958 she went to live, with her child, among men who had killed her husband. She did not go to accuse them, to demand an apology, or to extract a dramatic scene of repentance for the benefit of supporters at home. She went to live with them, to learn their language, to give them what medical help she could, and to tell them about God.

Whether that would bear fruit, no one knew. What happened over the next three years was neither as quick nor as simple as the legend later claimed, and the next chapter tries to tell it honestly. But the first fact is the one worth pausing on. She went in. She took the child. She stayed.

Among the Waorani

"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."
— 2 Corinthians 4:7, KJV

Three Years at Tiwaeno

Elisabeth lived among the Waorani for about three years, from October 1958 until late in 1961. They were among the most demanding years of her life, and among the most important. For most of that time she was at Tiwaeno, sharing the life of the clearing: its food, its weather, its illnesses and its quarrels. She gave medicine to the sick, took photographs, kept notebooks and above all worked at the language. Valerie grew from a toddler into a little girl who ran barefoot with the Waorani children and spoke their language easily.

The language remained the central task. Elisabeth set out to analyse it as she had been trained to do, working out its sounds and grammar systematically and recording what she heard. It was slow, painstaking work, and she knew that any translation of Scripture worth the name would depend on getting it right. Dayuma, meanwhile, went on telling her people what she had learned of God in her own words. Rachel worked closely with Dayuma, and over time the Bible stories that Dayuma told, and the phrases

that Rachel and Dayuma worked out together, became the main channel through which the Waorani heard the Christian message.

Something did begin to change. Over the years that followed, several of the people at Tiwaeno, including some of the men who had been on the beach in 1956, came to call themselves followers of God. Dayuma's influence was crucial. Gikita, the old leader of the attack, and Kimo, Dyuwi and Mincaye were among those who in time professed faith, and some became leaders among the believers. The cycle of revenge spearing that had dominated Waorani life for generations began to slow among those who had settled around the missionaries, though it did not stop all at once, and other Waorani groups who had no contact with the missionaries went on killing and being killed for years. A few years after Elisabeth had left, Kimo and Dyuwi baptised two of Nate Saint's children, Steve and Kathy, in the Curaray river, near the beach where their father had died.

The Savage My Kinsman

In 1961 Elisabeth published a book of photographs, with a spare accompanying text, about her first year among the Waorani. She called it *The Savage My Kinsman*. The title was itself a statement. Readers who had absorbed the language of savages and martyrs from the newspapers were confronted with pictures of men, women and children going about their lives, and with a title that insisted they were kin. The text did not claim mass conversions or a finished work. It showed a people, and a missionary among them, at the beginning of a long road.

The book was a sign of something else that was happening in her. Living with the Waorani, she had come to see how much of what she had brought with her was American culture rather than the gospel, and how little she could be sure of about what the people around her actually

understood. She did not lose her faith. But she was becoming less certain of many things that the missionary movement at home took for granted, and more aware of how easily missionaries confused their own hopes with God's work. Those questions would come out more fully in the years after she left Ecuador.

Two Strong Women

The hardest part of Tiwaeno was not the forest or the Waorani. It was Elisabeth's relationship with Rachel Saint. The two women had come in together, and they shared the same faith and the same desire that the Waorani should know Christ. Each had lost someone on the beach: Rachel her brother, Elisabeth her husband. But they were very different people, and the differences proved impossible to bridge.

Historians who have studied the mission, especially Kathryn Long in *God in the Rainforest* (2019), describe differences of personality, of theology, of missionary method and of linguistic training. Rachel was older, intensely devoted, and convinced that God had given her a particular calling to the Waorani through Dayuma. She came to treat the work, and to some extent the people, as hers, and she was reluctant to share it with others or to cooperate with other missionaries and organisations. She relied heavily on Dayuma, and she saw the Waorani in the traditional evangelical terms of a people lost in darkness and waiting for the light. Elisabeth, the more highly trained linguist, wanted to work from a careful analysis of the language, and she was increasingly troubled by questions about how much the Waorani could understand of a message delivered largely through a single intermediary in a few years. The two could not agree on how to go about translation, which was meant to be the centre of their work.

Neither woman comes out of the story as simply right. Rachel's possessiveness made life hard for Elisabeth and, later, for others. But Elisabeth could be cool, critical and quick to see the weaknesses in other people's thinking, and she was not easy to work with either. Both were under enormous pressure, isolated, often unwell, and watched by an evangelical public that expected a triumphant story. Both were, in Paul's phrase, earthen vessels. The friction between them is a reminder that God's work among the Waorani was carried by fallible people, as all his work is.

Leaving

In late 1961 Elisabeth left Tiwaeno. Her reasons were several. The conflict with Rachel had made shared work almost impossible, and it was clear that Rachel, with Dayuma, was going to remain. Valerie was approaching school age. Elisabeth may also have come to believe that the Waorani work did not need two outsiders pulling in different directions. Whatever the balance of reasons, she went without public complaint. Rachel stayed, and she lived among the Waorani for most of the rest of her life.

Elisabeth went back to the Quichua work she had known before, and for about two more years she continued among the Quichua with Valerie. In 1963, when Valerie was eight, the two of them left Ecuador and returned to the United States, settling in Franconia, New Hampshire, where her family had spent so many summers. She had come to Ecuador in 1952 as a single woman of twenty-five. She left eleven years later, aged thirty-six, a widow with a daughter, the author of three books, and a far more questioning and far more seasoned Christian than the young linguist who had arrived.

The verse at the head of this chapter is Paul's description of the gospel and of those who carry it: a treasure in earthen vessels, so that the power

may be seen to be God's and not ours. Elisabeth's Ecuador years had been full of loss, failure, misunderstanding and hard-won fruit, and almost none of it had gone the way anyone would have planned. She did not leave with a success story. She left with the conviction, which would shape everything she later wrote, that God does his work through cracked pots, and that he does not need the story to be tidy.

The Questions She Would Not Hide

"Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us. Selah."
— Psalm 62:8, KJV

Franconia

In 1963 Elisabeth Elliot came home. She was thirty-six. She had spent eleven years in Ecuador: first among the Colorados of the western forest, then among the Quichua of the eastern jungle, and for three years among the Waorani on the Curaray. She brought back with her Valerie, then eight, who had spent a good part of her early childhood in a Waorani clearing and now had to learn how to be an American schoolgirl. The two of them settled in Franconia, New Hampshire, in the White Mountains, the place where the Howard family had spent its summers and where Elisabeth had known, since she was a child, the woods, the granite and the long, hard winters.

She was by then famous in a way that very few missionaries had ever been. *Through Gates of Splendor* and *Shadow of the Almighty* had sold in great numbers. Her photograph had appeared in *Life*. Churches, colleges and conferences across the country wanted the widow of Jim Elliot to come and tell them the story of Palm Beach. She had a child to support, and her living now came largely from writing and speaking, so she accepted a good

many of the invitations. But the woman who stood up to speak was no longer quite the woman her audiences expected, and over the next few years that became increasingly plain.

What Ecuador Had Taught Her

The story of January 1956 had been told, in her own first book and in countless sermons since, as a story with a clear shape. Five young men had laid down their lives, and God had used their deaths to open a closed people to the gospel. Elisabeth never denied that God had been at work. She had seen it with her own eyes. Men who had speared her husband had become her neighbours, and some of them had become believers. But she had also seen, at very close range, how much of what happened did not fit the shape.

In San Miguel her language helper had been murdered and her work had been stolen. At Shandia she had lived on a station that the river had already once swept away. Among the Waorani the work had brought misunderstanding and rivalry among the missionaries as well as faith among the Indians, and her own time there had ended in strain with Rachel Saint. She had come away with hard questions about whether the missionaries, herself included, really understood what they were doing to a people's whole way of life, and about how much of what they called the Lord's work was in fact their own plans dressed up in pious language. Nothing in the sequence of her years in Ecuador had followed the logic of sacrifice and reward that devotional storytelling seemed to promise.

She came to believe that the honest thing was to say so. That conviction is the thread running through her writing in the 1960s. It made a good many of her readers uneasy, and it is a large part of the reason she is still read.

No Graven Image

In 1966 she published a novel, *No Graven Image*. Its heroine is a young, single missionary who goes to the highlands of Ecuador to reduce an unwritten Indian language to writing, in circumstances not unlike Elisabeth's own at San Miguel. She longs for a faithful language helper and for the kind of fruit she has been taught to expect. Near the end of the book, trying to help, she gives an injection to the very man on whom her work depends, and he dies. The novel does not turn this into a lesson. It ends with the missionary stripped of her assumptions about what God must do, and with the unsettling suggestion that the God she had been serving was, at least in part, an image of her own making.

Many evangelical readers were dismayed. They had come to the author of *Through Gates of Splendor* for another story of triumph, and they found instead a missionary whose labours end in a death that serves no visible purpose. Some concluded that she had lost her faith, or was close to losing it. Others, then and since, have seen the novel as the most searching thing she ever wrote: not an attack on God, but on the idols that well-meaning Christians set up in his place. The title comes from the second commandment. The book was her way of saying that a God who must always produce the results we have planned for him is not the God of the Bible, but a carved image with a Christian name.

Two more books followed in 1968. *Who Shall Ascend* was a life of R. Kenneth Strachan, the general director of the Latin America Mission, who had died a few years before. She had been asked to write it, and she wrote it in the way she now believed a missionary life ought to be written, leaving in his doubts, his inner conflicts and his sense of failure rather than polishing them away. Some of those who had hoped for a tribute were disappointed.

Others recognised in it a rare and humane honesty about the cost of Christian leadership.

The Liberty of Obedience, a short book, set out a theme that would run through the rest of her life. Christian freedom, she argued, is not found by escaping obedience to God but inside it. In the same book she questioned some of the rules and taboos by which evangelicals of her generation tended to measure holiness, and asked whether they had become a substitute for the harder obedience of the heart. The book was both a defence of submission to God and a protest against submission to mere convention, and readers on both sides found things in it they did not like.

Pouring Out the Heart

It would be easy to read these years as a crisis of faith, and some did at the time. The sources do not support so simple a picture. Her letters and journals from the period, on which her authorised biographer has drawn, show a woman who was lonely, often unsure of what she should do next, and doubtful about much that passed for missionary strategy. They do not show a woman abandoning Christ. What she abandoned was the habit of tidying things up. She came to think that the Christian's business is to trust God, not to explain him, and that the faithful thing to do with an unanswered question is to bring it to him rather than to hide it, whether from him or from other people.

Her honesty was not always gentle. She could be blunt to the point of severity, she had little patience with sentiment, and some who met her in these years found her cool and hard to know. Part of that was temperament. Part of it, perhaps, was the armour of a woman who had been widowed young, who had been made into a public symbol of a story she knew was

more complicated than its admirers wanted, and who had decided that she would not pretend.

That is what the psalm at the head of this chapter commends. The psalmist does not tell the people to compose themselves before they come to God, or to present him with a cleaned-up account of their lives. He tells them to pour out their hearts before him, because God is a refuge, and a refuge is a place for people who are in trouble. Elisabeth Elliot's refusal to hide her questions cost her some admirers in the 1960s. It also prepared her, in ways she could not yet see, to speak in later years to the bereaved, the lonely and the bewildered with an authority that no tidy story could have given her.

Addison Leitch

"Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour."
— Ecclesiastes 4:9, KJV

A Theologian from Pittsburgh

Addison Hardie Leitch was born in 1908 in Ben Avon, Pennsylvania, a small town on the Ohio River just below Pittsburgh, and he grew up in that part of the state. As a young man he went out to Egypt under the foreign mission board of the United Presbyterian Church of North America and taught science for a year or so at Assiut College, on the Nile. He came home to study for the ministry at Pittsburgh-Xenia Theological Seminary, and in 1936 he married Margaret Heslip. He then went on to Cambridge, where he took a doctorate in 1938. He and Margaret had four daughters.

His career was spent in the colleges and seminaries of American Presbyterianism. In the early 1940s he was dean of men and college pastor at Grove City College in western Pennsylvania. From 1946 he taught at his old seminary in Pittsburgh, and for some years in the later 1950s he was its president. In 1961 he moved to Tarkio College, a small Presbyterian college in north-western Missouri, as professor of philosophy and religion. He was also a well-known writer for the evangelical press and a regular contributor

to *Christianity Today*. Those who knew him remembered a big personality: a lively, funny, well-read man, a gifted teacher, at ease in argument and at home in the pulpit.

A Second Marriage

He and Elisabeth Elliot met in the later 1960s; most accounts connect their meeting with one of her speaking engagements, and some date it to 1967. By the accounts of those who knew them, she was quickly drawn to him. Here, for the first time since 1956, was a man who was her equal in mind and in conviction, who had read what she had read, and who was not overawed by her fame. Margaret Leitch was by then seriously ill, and she died in 1968. The friendship between Addison and Elisabeth moved quickly after Margaret's death, and before the year was out they were engaged. The speed of it surprised some of their friends and troubled a few. The sources do not suggest anything improper, and this book does not speculate beyond them; it records only that both of them had known long loneliness and that neither saw any reason to wait.

They were married on New Year's Day, 1 January 1969. Elisabeth was forty-two; Addison was sixty. She had been a widow for thirteen years.

The marriage brought her east again, though not back to New Hampshire. That same year Addison joined the faculty of the newly formed Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, in Hamilton, on the North Shore of Massachusetts, to teach theology. Elisabeth left Franconia, and she and Valerie, now a teenager, moved with him to Hamilton. The North Shore was to be her home for the rest of her life.

The seminary itself was new. It had been formed in 1969 by the merger of Gordon Divinity School, in Wenham, and the Conwell School of Theology, in Philadelphia, with the encouragement of Billy Graham and

the support of a number of evangelical leaders and benefactors, and its first president was Harold John Ockenga. Its campus, on a wooded hill in Hamilton, had previously belonged to a Roman Catholic religious order. Addison came to it as a senior and experienced teacher, and he was one of the scholars who gave the young school its early standing. For Valerie the marriage meant a new home, a new school, a stepfather and four stepsisters, all of them a good deal older than she was. She had spent her childhood with one parent; now she had two.

Four Good Years

By the accounts of those who knew them, the years with Addison were happy ones. He was, by these accounts, warm and protective, and he enjoyed her company and her mind. She, who had been both mother and father to Valerie for most of the girl's life, now had a husband to share the burden and a household that was not organised around one woman's capacity to cope. She went on writing and speaking, and he encouraged her to do both.

For a woman who would later teach a great deal about marriage, these years matter. Her first marriage had lasted little more than two years and had been lived almost entirely on a mission station, in two languages not her own, under the shadow of a dangerous plan. Her second was lived in an ordinary American town, among books, students and church, in the middle of life.

Cancer

It did not last. In the last year or so of his life Addison was found to have cancer. The illness was long and hard. Elisabeth nursed him at home,

through the treatments and the slow failure of a large and vigorous body, and she watched the man who had restored her to ordinary happiness become weak and dependent. In these years, and in the time just after, she took lodgers into the house. One of them, a man named Lars Gren, was to matter a great deal in the years ahead.

Addison Leitch died on 17 September 1973, at the age of sixty-four; a few accounts give the following day. Elisabeth was forty-six, and for the second time a widow.

The two bereavements could hardly have been more different. The first had come suddenly, by violence, on a river in the forest, to a young wife with a baby, and it had been turned almost at once into a public story with a meaning attached. The second came slowly, in a quiet house, after months of nursing, to a middle-aged woman with a grown daughter, and no one made a book or a magazine spread out of it. She was left to grieve without an audience.

She did not write a book about Addison's death, but it went deep into everything she wrote afterwards about suffering, loneliness and the will of God. Her conviction that suffering is never wasted was not formed in a study. It was tested at the bedside of a dying husband, and in the empty house afterwards. Readers who later found her firm, even stern, on these subjects were reading a woman who had twice been through what she was describing.

The verse at the head of this chapter speaks of the good reward that two receive for their labour together. The Preacher goes on to say that if one falls, the other will lift up his fellow, and he pities the one who is alone when he falls. Elisabeth Elliot knew both sides of that saying. For four years she had a companion in her labour. Then she was alone again, and the One who had lifted her up in 1956 had to do it a second time.

Lars, and Magnolia

"God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains: but the rebellious dwell in a dry land."
— Psalm 68:6, KJV

A Widow in Hamilton

After Addison's death Elisabeth stayed in Hamilton. She had a house, a church, friends at the seminary and a living to earn, and she went on earning it in the way she knew. She wrote, she spoke, and in 1974 she was appointed an adjunct professor at Gordon-Conwell, a post she held for about two years. Later, in 1981, she spent a year as writer-in-residence at Gordon College in nearby Wenham.

One of the lodgers in her house in those years was Lars Gren. He was ten years younger than Elisabeth, born in September 1936, and he had worked as a salesman before deciding, in middle life, to go to seminary and train as a hospital chaplain. Over the following years a friendship grew between them, and the friendship became something more. In December 1977, four years after Addison's death, they were married. Elisabeth was turning fifty-one, and it was her third marriage. She went on writing and speaking as Elisabeth Elliot, the name under which her readers knew her.

Let Me Be a Woman

In the same years Valerie grew up and married. Her husband, Walter Shepard, was to become a Presbyterian minister, and in time they had eight children, so that the woman who had once been a young widow with a single baby in the Ecuadorian jungle became the grandmother of a large family. Around the time of Valerie's marriage Elisabeth wrote her a series of letters about what it meant to be a woman, a wife and a Christian. They were published in 1976 as *Let Me Be a Woman*. In 1981 she followed it with *The Mark of a Man*, a companion book addressed to men.

These books, and the many talks she gave on the same themes in the decades that followed, made her one of the best-known evangelical voices on men and women. She taught that the difference between the sexes is a gift of God and not an accident of culture, that a Christian woman should receive her womanhood gladly rather than resent it, and that in marriage a wife is called to submit to her husband's headship as the church submits to Christ. Admirers and critics alike noticed that she herself had done things few women of her generation had done: she had gone alone to the forest, reduced an unwritten language to writing and lived among a people whom most outsiders feared. She saw no contradiction. In her view a single woman was free to serve God in ways a wife might not be, and submission in marriage was a particular calling within a particular relationship, not a judgement on the worth or abilities of women in general. She wrote against the feminist movement of the 1970s as she understood it, and she believed it had taught women to despise the very callings in which many of them could most fully serve God.

Many readers found in her teaching a clarity and a dignity they had looked for in vain elsewhere. Women who were wives and mothers, often quietly and without recognition, heard from her that their work was a

calling and not a consolation prize. Others, including many evangelicals who believed that Scripture teaches the full equality of men and women in the home and the church, criticised her sharply. They argued that she read the Bible through the conventions of mid-century American life, that her own career as a pioneer missionary, linguist, author and public speaker sat awkwardly with what she told other women, and that teaching on submission given without enough qualification could be used to keep women in marriages that were harming them. The debate continues among Christians who love the Bible on both sides of it. This book is the story of her life, not an assessment of her teaching; the companion volume, *The Key Teachings of Elisabeth Elliot*, weighs her views under Scripture. It is enough to say here that she held them sincerely, that she believed she was obeying God in teaching them, and that she did not retreat from them when she was criticised.

Magnolia

In time Elisabeth and Lars made their home in Magnolia, a village on the rocky coast of Cape Ann, part of the city of Gloucester, a few miles from Hamilton. The house stood close to the sea. It was from there that she wrote most of her later books and went out to most of her later engagements.

Lars took charge of the business side of her ministry. He managed her diary, made the arrangements for her travels, handled much of her publishing and oversaw the sale of her books, and for many years he travelled with her almost everywhere she went. Her public work grew enormously during their marriage, and it is unlikely that it would have taken the shape it did without his energy and organisation.

A Harder Marriage Than It Looked

The marriage was, however, harder than most of her readers knew. The fullest account of it is in Ellen Vaughn's authorised biography, whose second volume, *Being Elisabeth Elliot*, appeared in 2023, and what follows rests on that published account. Vaughn had much less to go on for these years than for the earlier ones, because, as she reports, Lars destroyed most of Elisabeth's journals from the years of their marriage, a decision she says he came to regret. Drawing on the memories of family and close friends, Vaughn describes a husband given to outbursts of temper, who in time came to control much of Elisabeth's daily life, including her diary and how often she saw her friends. Elisabeth herself did not speak of these things in public, and she remained married to him for the rest of her life.

A biography written for readers who loved her has to be honest here, as she would have wanted it to be, and it also has to be fair. This account depends on a source written after her death, from the testimony of those close to her, and Lars's own perspective is largely missing from it. This book does not go beyond what Vaughn reports, and it does not presume to judge a marriage from the outside. It is also true, as a later chapter will show, that when her mind failed it was Lars who insisted on caring for her at home, and who did so for many years. Both things belong to the record, and neither cancels the other.

The verse at the head of this chapter says that God sets the solitary in families. Elisabeth Elliot had been solitary for much of her adult life. In these years God gave her a son-in-law, a household of grandchildren and a third husband, and the family he gave her was, like most families, both a mercy and a cross.

Gateway to Joy

"The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee."
— Jeremiah 31:3, KJV

A Newsletter and a Shelf of Books

The 1980s were the most productive decade of Elisabeth Elliot's public life. In her mid-fifties, settled on the North Shore with Lars managing her affairs, she began to write and speak at a pace that would have exhausted a younger woman, and the audience she reached grew far beyond the readers who had first known her as a missionary widow.

Around 1982 she began to send out a short newsletter of her own to anyone who asked for it. *The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter* was a plain, personal publication: a few pages of reflection on a passage of Scripture or a question from a reader, news of her family and her travels, and a list of where she would be speaking. It ran for more than twenty years, until 2003, and many of her later books were gathered, wholly or partly, from its pages.

The books themselves came steadily. *Discipline: The Glad Surrender* (1982) set out her conviction that the disciplines of body, mind, time and feeling are not burdens laid on the Christian but ways of offering the whole of life to God. *Passion and Purity* (1984) told, for the first time at length

and in her own words, the story of her slow, restrained courtship with Jim Elliot, and used it to urge young Christians to entrust their longings for love and marriage to God. It became one of the most widely read of all her books, especially among young evangelicals in America, and it shaped the way a generation thought about romance. In later years it was also criticised, by some who had grown up in the purity movement of the 1990s, for setting a standard of restraint that some readers had turned into a source of anxiety and shame. That debate belongs to the companion volume on her teaching.

In 1987 came *A Chance to Die*, her life of Amy Carmichael. It was in some ways the repayment of a debt. Elisabeth had read Amy Carmichael's books as a girl, and the Irish missionary who had given her life to rescuing children in South India, and who founded the Dohnavur Fellowship there, had been one of the formative influences on her own call. The biography is warm but not uncritical, and it is still one of the best ways into Amy Carmichael's life. Two of Amy Carmichael's own books, *Things as They Are* and *If*, are in the Ochorus library.

Lincoln, Nebraska

In 1988 Back to the Bible, the radio ministry based in Lincoln, Nebraska, invited her to present a new daily programme for women. It was to be short, about a quarter of an hour, and broadcast on Christian stations across the United States and beyond. She agreed, and the programme was called *Gateway to Joy*. She spoke in the same clear, level, unhurried voice that audiences already knew from her conference addresses.

Each programme began in the same way. She reminded her listeners that they were loved with an everlasting love, as the verse at the head of this chapter says, and that underneath were the everlasting arms, in the words of

Moses' blessing in Deuteronomy. Then she introduced herself as their friend and turned to the day's subject. For thirteen years, from 1988 to 2001, those two sentences of Scripture went out to a very large audience, and for many listeners they became the thing they remembered best.

The subjects were often startlingly ordinary. She spoke about prayer and the will of God, about suffering and loneliness and widowhood, about marriage and the bringing up of children. But she also spoke about tidiness and punctuality, about manners and hospitality, about washing dishes and answering letters and getting up in the morning. Her conviction was that the Christian life is lived chiefly in such things, and that the faithful doing of small duties is not a lesser form of devotion than the dramatic sacrifices people admire. The programme was carried on Christian stations across America and, in time, in other countries too, and it reached women in kitchens and cars, in hospitals and nursing homes, at hours when few of them could have gone to a meeting. Listeners wrote to her and to Back to the Bible in great numbers, and many of them said that she had addressed them as adults, without flattery and without fuss.

On the Road

At the same time she spoke at conferences, churches, colleges and women's meetings across America and in other countries, with Lars almost always beside her. The books continued. *Loneliness* (1988) drew on her widowhoods and on her single years in Ecuador. *On Asking God Why* (1989) was a collection of short essays on trust. *A Path Through Suffering* (1990) used the life of plants and the lessons of the countryside to think about pain and fruitfulness. *Keep a Quiet Heart* (1995) gathered pieces from the newsletter. *Quest for Love* (1996), a sequel to *Passion and Purity*,

told the stories of other men and women who had tried to keep their love affairs under God's rule.

Her manner did not soften with fame. She was crisp, direct and at times severe. She disliked sentimentality, self-pity and what she regarded as the cult of feelings in modern Christianity, and she said so. Some found her cold. Many more, especially women who were bereaved, lonely, unhappily single or simply worn out by ordinary duties, found her bracing. She did not tell them that their troubles were small. She told them that God was great and that he was with them in their troubles, and she spoke as one who had been through more than most of them.

Underneath

There is a certain irony in the shape of these years. The woman who opened every programme with the assurance of the everlasting arms was, as the previous chapter showed, carrying burdens at home that few of her listeners suspected, and, by Vaughn's account, she was by temperament a reserved person for whom public life was often a strain. None of that appeared in the broadcasts. Some will see in that a failure of candour from a woman who prized candour. Others will see the discipline she taught: the refusal to make her own trials the subject of her ministry, and the resolve to point her hearers past herself.

Either way, the promise she repeated was not hers. It was God's, spoken first through Jeremiah to a people in exile who had every reason to think he had stopped loving them. Elisabeth Elliot spent thirteen years telling ordinary people that it still held. There is good reason to think she was telling herself the same thing.

The Next Thing

"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."
— Ecclesiastes 9:10, KJV

An Old Poem

Among the things Elisabeth Elliot quoted most often, in her books, her newsletter and her broadcasts, was an anonymous poem of the nineteenth century that had been printed and reprinted in devotional collections for generations. It begins, "From an old English parsonage down by the sea," and tells of a message found there, carved in an old-fashioned spelling. The message was four words long: "Doe the nexte thynge." The poem goes on to commend those words to anyone who is anxious, overwhelmed or uncertain of the way ahead. One need not see the whole road. One need only do, in faith, the duty that lies nearest.

She had known it for many years, and it became a kind of motto for her. It is easy to see why. Her life had been a series of moments in which the larger picture was hidden. In January 1956 she had not known what had happened on the Curaray, and then she had known only that her husband was dead. In 1961 she had not known what she ought to do among the Waorani, or whether she should stay. In 1973 she had not known how she

would live without Addison. On each occasion, the sources suggest, she did what lay in front of her: she cared for her child, she kept up her work, she answered her letters, she wrote the next page. And the next thing, done, revealed the thing after it.

The phrase became one of the best-known things about her. Listeners to *Gateway to Joy* heard it many times, and readers of her newsletter came to expect it. To some it sounded too simple. But she did not offer it as a technique for managing life. She offered it as a form of obedience, and as a cure for the kind of anxiety that tries to live tomorrow before it has arrived. It sits close to the Lord's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount that each day has enough trouble of its own.

Never for Nothing

The other conviction that ran through all her later work was that suffering, in the hands of God, is never wasted. She did not mean that suffering is good in itself, or that Christians should pretend it does not hurt, or that every sorrow can be explained. She was impatient with all three of those ideas. She meant that God, who had brought the greatest good the world has known out of the cross of his Son, could be trusted to bring good out of the suffering of those who belong to him, even when they could not see how.

She came to that belief by the hard road. She had lost a language helper to murder and years of work to a thief. She had lost a husband to the spears of the very people she later went to live among, and another to cancer. She had seen the mission she had given herself to divided by quarrels. She did not claim to understand why any of these things had happened. What she claimed was that none of them had been for nothing, and she held to that claim to the end of her working life.

She was careful to distinguish this from a fatalist's shrug. The Christian who suffers, in her teaching, is not simply giving in to what cannot be helped. He is trusting a Father who is known to be good, taking what comes as from his hand and giving it back to him. What happens may look the same either way; the difference lies in the One who is trusted. That distinction, worked out in her own losses, lay behind a great deal of what she said to the bereaved and the disappointed in her books and on the radio.

Correcting the Story

One of the next things she did, in the middle of her busiest years, was to go back to the story that had made her famous. In 1996, forty years after the deaths on Palm Beach, a new edition of *Through Gates of Splendor* was published with an epilogue in which she looked again at what had happened among the Waorani since 1956. She acknowledged that events had not unfolded as simply as the first edition, and the many sermons based on it, had suggested. Historians have since filled in that picture. Killings among the Waorani did not stop at once; the growth of the church among them was real but uneven; and the dealings between the outsiders and the Waorani, missionaries included, were more complicated, and in places more painful, than the early telling allowed.

It was not a recantation. She still believed that God had been at work in 1956 and afterwards, and that the five men had been right to go. But she would not let the story harden into a legend that served the comfort of its admirers at the expense of the truth. She had been saying the same thing, in one way or another, since the 1960s. Now she said it in the book itself.

That was a costly kind of honesty. *Through Gates of Splendor* was by then a classic of missionary literature, and many readers loved it exactly as it was. She did not need to disturb it. Her reputation would have been safer if

she had left it alone. But she had learned at San Miguel, and in the writing of *No Graven Image*, that faith built on a story that is too good to be true is faith in the wrong thing.

A Grandmother

Through these years her family grew. Valerie and Walter Shepard had eight children, and Elisabeth took a close interest in all of them. She had written *The Shaping of a Christian Family* in 1992, looking back on the home in which she had grown up, with its family worship, its hymns and its Scripture memory, and she hoped to see something of the same pattern carried on into the next generations.

She went on writing into her seventies. Collections of her shorter pieces, including *Secure in the Everlasting Arms* (2002) and *Be Still My Soul* (2003), gathered the work of many years. But by the turn of the century those around her had begun to notice changes. *Gateway to Joy* came to an end in 2001. The newsletter ended two years later. The next thing, for Elisabeth Elliot, was to be the hardest of all.

The verse at the head of this chapter comes from a book she knew well. The Preacher does not tell his readers to understand everything before they act. He tells them to do with their might whatever their hand finds to do, because life is short and the opportunity will not last. She spent her life doing that, one duty at a time, and she believed that the God who gave the duties would take care of the rest.

The Long Twilight

"And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you."
— Isaiah 46:4, KJV

The Failing of Words

Elisabeth Elliot had lived by words. She had gone to Wheaton to study Greek so that she could translate the Scriptures. She had gone to Ecuador to reduce unwritten languages to writing, and she had worked in Spanish, in the Colorado language, in Quichua and in the language of the Waorani. She had written more than twenty books, thousands of pages of letters and newsletters, and the scripts of hundreds upon hundreds of radio talks, and she had spoken to audiences on several continents. Clarity of language was, for her, almost a moral matter. She disliked vagueness, jargon and sentiment because she thought they were ways of avoiding the truth.

It was her words that began to go first. In the late 1990s she and those closest to her began to notice lapses of memory and moments of confusion that could no longer be put down to tiredness or age, and by about 2000 she had been diagnosed with dementia; accounts differ by a year or two over the date. It progressed slowly at first. For a while she was able to continue some of her work, with help. *Gateway to Joy* ended in 2001, after thirteen

years. The newsletter that had run for more than two decades ended in 2003, and in 2004 she gave up public speaking. After that she withdrew from public life altogether. The decision was made for her by the illness, but it was also, in its way, characteristic. She had always been a private person, and she did not become a spectacle in her decline. The public simply stopped hearing from her, and most of her readers learned only gradually, and at second hand, why.

There is a particular sorrow in the decline of a mind that has served God and others so well. Many who had been helped by her books felt it as a personal loss, and some wondered aloud how it could be that a woman who had taught so many people to trust God in suffering should herself be brought to a place where she could no longer speak of him. She had no answer to give them now. But she had given her answer long before. She had always insisted that God does not owe us an explanation, and that the suffering he permits is never for nothing, whether or not we are able to see its purpose. In her last years she was no longer able to say those things. She was left simply to live them.

At Home in Magnolia

Lars decided that she would stay at home. Rather than place her in a nursing home, he looked after her himself in the house at Magnolia for the rest of her life. It was a long and wearing task. Dementia lasted in her case for the better part of fifteen years, and in its later stages she needed care at every hour of the day. Whatever else is to be said about their marriage, and the previous chapters have tried to say it fairly, this was faithful service, and it deserves to be recorded. Lars was himself in his early sixties when the illness was diagnosed and nearly seventy-nine when it ended. Caring for someone with dementia at home is among the hardest kinds of love:

unrelenting, largely unseen and usually unthanked by the very person for whom it is done, who often no longer knows who is caring for them. Families who have done it will recognise the cost.

Valerie and her family visited, and old friends came when they could. The illness took its usual slow course, and in time the woman whose words had reached millions could say very little. This book does not try to say more than that about her inward life in these years. No one can know it, and those who loved her have been rightly reticent about it.

15 June 2015

Elisabeth Elliot died at home in Magnolia on the morning of Monday 15 June 2015. She was eighty-eight. It was fifty-nine years since the deaths on the Curaray, nearly forty-two since the death of Addison Leitch, and more than a decade since she had last spoken in public.

Her funeral was held on Tuesday 23 June at the A. J. Gordon Memorial Chapel of Gordon College, in Wenham, not far from the places where she had spent the second half of her life. A month later, on 26 July, a memorial service was held at her old college, in the Edman Memorial Chapel at Wheaton, where she had studied Greek seventy years before. Tributes came from across the evangelical world and far beyond it, from people who had read her books in their youth, listened to her on the radio in their kitchens, or been sustained by her in times of grief. Many of them, inevitably, spoke of 1956, and of the young widow who had gone to live with the men who had killed her husband. That was the story the world remembered. Some of the more perceptive spoke instead of the long years afterwards, which had been, in their way, a harder test.

Lars Gren outlived her by nearly ten years. He died in Little Rock, Arkansas, on 2 April 2025, at the age of eighty-eight, and was buried in

Hamilton, Massachusetts.

Carried

The verse at the head of this chapter was spoken by God through Isaiah to a people who had grown old under his care. He contrasts himself with the idols of Babylon, which have to be lifted onto the backs of beasts and carried. The true God does the opposite. He carries his people. He made them, he has borne them since they were born, and he will carry them even to their grey hairs.

Elisabeth Elliot had spent much of her life carrying others: a baby in the jungle, a grieving household, a dying husband, a public that wanted her to bear the weight of a story, and countless readers and listeners who brought their sorrows to her. In her last years she could carry nothing, not even her own memories. Someone else had to carry her, and, behind every human hand that did it, the One she had trusted since childhood carried her too. There is a lesson in that for a culture that measures the worth of a life by what a person can still do. For more than ten years Elisabeth Elliot could do almost nothing, and her life was no less precious to God, and no less a life of faith, than it had been when she stood before thousands. She had written for decades about the everlasting arms. In the long twilight of her life she had nothing left to rest on but those arms, and they held.

The Legacy of Elisabeth Elliot

"Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation."
— Hebrews 13:7, KJV

The Books

When Elisabeth Elliot died in 2015 she had been silent for more than ten years, and some of her younger admirers knew her only as a name on the spine of a book their mothers had given them. Yet her books had never gone out of print. *Through Gates of Splendor* and *Shadow of the Almighty* were still being read as classics of missionary history, in English and in translation, and publishers have continued to issue new editions of her books in the years since her death. *Passion and Purity*, *Let Me Be a Woman*, *Keep a Quiet Heart* and *A Chance to Die* were still being given to young women, passed between friends and discussed in church study groups. In the years since her death, recordings of *Gateway to Joy* have been made available again, and a new generation has heard the old opening words about the everlasting love and the everlasting arms.

Her family has also opened the record of her early life. In 2019 Valerie Elliot Shepard published *Devotedly*, drawn from the letters and journals of her parents during their long courtship and short marriage. It allowed

readers to hear Jim and Elisabeth in their own words, and it showed more fully than any earlier book how much the two of them had struggled, hoped and waited.

The Biographers

For most of her life the story of Elisabeth Elliot was told chiefly by Elisabeth Elliot. Since her death that has changed. Ellen Vaughn's authorised biography, in two volumes, *Becoming Elisabeth Elliot* (2020) and *Being Elisabeth Elliot* (2023), was written with access to her surviving journals and letters through the co-operation of her family. It is warm and admiring, but it does not hide her faults or the difficulties of her marriages. Lucy S. R. Austen's *Elisabeth Elliot: A Life* (2023) is an independent biography, the fruit of long work in the sources. And the historian Kathryn T. Long's *God in the Rainforest* (2019) set the events of 1956 and after in the full history of the mission to the Waorani.

Many missionaries of the generations after hers have said that her books, and the story of Jim and his companions, were among the things that first turned their thoughts towards serving Christ overseas, and many others, who never left home, have said that she taught them how to grieve. These biographies have not diminished her. If anything they have made her more credible. The woman who emerges from them is more complicated than the saint of the evangelical imagination: proud at times, often lonely, sometimes harsh, prone to discouragement, and capable of serious misjudgements. She is also, unmistakably, a woman who kept faith with Christ through a long and costly life, and who never stopped trying to tell the truth about it.

The story that made her famous has also been retold. Long and other historians have shown how much of what happened among the Waorani

after 1956 depended on the Waorani themselves: on Dayuma, who carried the message back to her own people; on Mintaka and Mankamu, who came out of the forest and went back into it; and on the decisions of Waorani men and women who chose to put down the spear. Missionaries, including Elisabeth and Rachel Saint, played their part, sometimes wisely and sometimes not. The life of the Waorani people in the decades since has included real Christian faith, painful change and continuing struggles over land and the oil industry, and their own voices are now heard in its telling. Some of the men who had taken part in the killings lived to old age as Christian leaders among their own people. One of them, Mincaye, became a close friend of Nate Saint's son Steve and travelled with him in the United States, telling his own story to audiences who had grown up on the story of 1956, and the friendship was the subject of a feature film, *End of the Spear*, released in 2006.

Elisabeth would not have objected to this. In a sense she began it. Her epilogue of 1996, and the long refusal behind it to let the story of Palm Beach become a legend, prepared her readers for a fuller and more honest account than the one she had first written as a grieving widow not yet thirty.

Where She Must Be Weighed

Gratitude for her life is not the same as agreement with everything she taught. Her views on men and women, marriage and submission remain contested among Christians who take Scripture seriously, and the arguments on both sides deserve a hearing. *Passion and Purity* has been criticised by some who grew up in the purity movement it helped to shape. Her bluntness wounded some who came to her for help. The early, triumphant telling of 1956, in which she played a large part, encouraged a

style of missionary storytelling that she herself later worked to correct. These questions belong chiefly to her teaching, and they are considered in the companion volume, *The Key Teachings of Elisabeth Elliot*. They are named here so that no reader mistakes this book's gratitude for an endorsement of everything she said. She would have wanted every claim tested by Scripture, and she would have been the first to point her readers past herself to Christ.

Considering the End

The verse at the head of this chapter tells Christians to remember those who have spoken to them the word of God, and to follow their faith, considering the end of their conversation, that is, the outcome of their whole manner of life. It does not tell us to copy them in everything. It tells us to look at how their lives turned out, and to follow the faith that carried them there.

Considered in that way, the life of Elisabeth Elliot is a remarkable witness. A girl from a strict and loving Philadelphia household learned Greek to translate the Bible, went alone to the forests of Ecuador, lost her work, her helper and her husband, went to live with the men who had killed him, came home with her questions unhidden, was widowed again, married a third time into a harder life than anyone saw, spoke to millions, and then, for her last ten years and more, was silent. Through all of it she held, sometimes grimly, to the conviction that God is sovereign, that he is good, and that nothing offered to him is ever wasted. The courage of 1956 made her famous. The courage of the long decades afterwards, the courage to obey, to tell the truth and to keep going, is the reason she is still worth following. One does not have to agree with everything she taught to see that, or to be grateful for it.

Appendix A: Lessons from the Life of Elisabeth Elliot

> *"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."*
> *— Romans 15:4, KJV*

The lessons below are not a summary of Elisabeth Elliot's teaching, which is set out in the companion volume. They are lessons drawn from her life, the things her story suggests to anyone trying to follow Christ. Each is set beside a passage of Scripture, because her life is worth learning from only in so far as it points back to the Word she trusted.

1. Obedience Comes Before Understanding

Again and again she had to act without knowing how things would turn out: going to Ecuador single, marrying a man who had made her wait for years, going into the forest with a small child. She did not wait for explanations before she obeyed. "Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter" (John 13:7, KJV).

2. Waiting Is Not Wasted

Her courtship with Jim Elliot lasted five years, most of them spent apart and in uncertainty. She learned to entrust her longings to God rather than to seize them. The waiting shaped her as much as the having did. "Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD" (Psalm 27:14, KJV).

3. Loss Can Be Offered to God

A murdered helper, a stolen suitcase of language work, a husband speared on a sandbar: she did not pretend these losses were small. She learned to offer them to God as she would have offered a gift, and to trust that nothing so offered is wasted. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28, KJV).

4. Love Your Enemies, Literally

Within three years of Jim's death she was living among the men who had killed him, sharing their food and learning their language. Some of them became her brothers in Christ. Forgiveness for her was not a feeling but a place to live. "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44, KJV).

5. Tell the Truth, Even About Heroes

She would not let the story of 1956 harden into a legend. She told the truth about missionary failures, including her own, and she added an epilogue to

her most famous book to do it. Christians do not need flattering stories to sustain their faith. "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another" (Ephesians 4:25, KJV).

6. God Is Not Our Tool

In *No Graven Image* she exposed the habit of treating God as a means to the results we want. She learned in Ecuador that he will not be managed, and that his purposes are larger than our plans. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD" (Isaiah 55:8, KJV).

7. Questions Belong in Prayer

She did not hide her doubts, either from God or from her readers. She brought them to him. Honest lament is not the opposite of faith but one of its forms. "Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us" (Psalm 62:8, KJV).

8. Do the Next Thing

When the whole road was hidden, she did the duty in front of her. Her watchword, borrowed from an old poem, is a cure for the anxiety that tries to live tomorrow today. "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matthew 6:34, KJV).

9. Small Duties Are Holy

For thirteen years she spoke on the radio about washing dishes, keeping promises and answering letters as well as about prayer and suffering. She believed that God is served in ordinary things as truly as in dramatic ones. "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much" (Luke 16:10, KJV).

10. Grief Is Real, and So Is Hope

Widowed twice, she grieved in earnest, and she would not hurry others through their grief. But she grieved as one who believed in the resurrection. "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13, KJV).

11. Saints Are Sinners Being Made Holy

Her biographers have shown her pride, her severity and the difficulties of her home life. None of that makes her less worth learning from. It shows that God works through flawed people, and that the faith we follow is finally Christ's, not theirs. "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help" (Psalm 146:3, KJV).

12. God Carries Us to the End

In her last years she could neither teach nor write nor remember. She was carried, by her husband and by her God. Faithfulness in old age is sometimes simply a matter of being held. "Now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto

this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come" (Psalm 71:18, KJV).

Appendix B: Chapter-by-Chapter Study and Reflection Guide

"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."
— James 1:22, KJV

This guide is for personal reflection, small groups, or a reading course of about twenty-four weeks. Its purpose is not to make Elisabeth Elliot an object of admiration, but to let her life hold up a mirror in which readers can examine their own discipleship under Scripture. Groups may find it helpful to begin each session with the chapter's opening verse and to end with prayer. Those who want to go further are encouraged to read her own books, obtained from their publishers or a library, alongside these chapters.

Chapter 1 - Brussels and Germantown

Central idea

Elisabeth Howard was born to missionary parents in Brussels and raised in a large, devout Philadelphia family, where her father edited the *Sunday School Times*.

Scriptures to revisit

Psalm 139:13-16; Psalm 16:6; Acts 17:26.

Reflection

1. What did the faith of your family, or its absence, give you? 2. Where has God placed you, and to what end?

Chapter 2 - A House Ordered by Scripture

Central idea

Family worship, hymns, Scripture memory, firm discipline and summers in Franconia formed habits of faith that lasted her whole life.

Scriptures to revisit

Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Joshua 24:15; 2 Timothy 3:14-15.

Reflection

1. What habits of faith shape your household? 2. Which passages of Scripture do you know by heart, and which would you like to?

Chapter 3 - Hampden DuBose

Central idea

At a Christian boarding school in Florida a shy, serious girl was stretched and tested, and her sense of a call to missionary service grew.

Scriptures to revisit

Ecclesiastes 12:1; 1 Samuel 3:10; Isaiah 6:8.

Reflection

1. When did you first sense that God might have work for you to do? 2. Who encouraged you then?

Chapter 4 - Greek at Wheaton

Central idea

She studied classical Greek so that she could translate the Scriptures, and she met Jim Elliot, her brother's friend.

Scriptures to revisit

Proverbs 2:3-5; 2 Timothy 2:15; Psalm 119:130.

Reflection

1. How are you using your mind in the service of God's Word? 2. What friendships has God used to change the direction of your life?

Chapter 5 - A Love Laid on the Altar

Central idea

Elisabeth and Jim acknowledged their love but gave it back to God, uncertain whether he would ever allow them to marry.

Scriptures to revisit

Genesis 22:1-14; Romans 12:1; Psalm 37:4-5.

Reflection

1. What desire are you holding most tightly? 2. What would it mean to lay it on the altar?

Chapter 6 - The Waiting Years

Central idea

Years of separation, letters, study at Prairie Bible Institute and training in linguistics tested two young people's patience and faith.

Scriptures to revisit

Psalm 27:14; Lamentations 3:25-26; Isaiah 40:31.

Reflection

1. What are you waiting for, and how are you waiting? 2. How has a season of waiting shaped you?

Chapter 7 - San Miguel de los Colorados

Central idea

As a single missionary in the western forest of Ecuador, she set out with other women to reduce the Colorado language to writing.

Scriptures to revisit

Romans 10:14-15; Psalm 96:3; Matthew 28:19-20.

Reflection

1. Who around you has never heard the gospel in words they understand?
2. What part might you play?

Chapter 8 - Macario, and a Stolen Suitcase

Central idea

Her language helper was murdered and her work was stolen: losses that no explanation could make sense of.

Scriptures to revisit

Job 1:21; Habakkuk 3:17-18; 2 Corinthians 4:8-9.

Reflection

1. What loss in your life has never been explained? 2. Can you offer it to God without an explanation?

Chapter 9 - Quichua First

Central idea

Engaged in January 1953, she set aside her own plans to learn Quichua in the eastern jungle before marrying Jim.

Scriptures to revisit

Proverbs 16:9; Philippians 2:3-4; James 4:13-15.

Reflection

1. Whose plans govern your life? 2. What would yielding a plan cost you this year?

Chapter 10 - 8 October 1953

Central idea

A civil wedding in Quito on Jim's twenty-sixth birthday began a marriage with very little ceremony and a great deal of purpose.

Scriptures to revisit

Genesis 2:24; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Ephesians 5:25.

Reflection

1. What makes a marriage strong when outward things are plain? 2. How can you honour the marriages around you?

Chapter 11 - Shandia

Central idea

Married life among the Quichua, on a station rebuilt after a flood, and the birth of Valerie in February 1955.

Scriptures to revisit

Psalm 127:3; 1 Corinthians 15:58; Galatians 6:9.

Reflection

1. Where is your labour unseen? 2. How do you keep going when the fruit is slow?

Chapter 12 - Palm Beach

Central idea

Five young men set out to reach the Waorani, agreed not to use their guns against them, and were killed on 8 January 1956.

Scriptures to revisit

John 12:24-25; John 15:13; Revelation 12:11.

Reflection

1. What would you refuse to do even to save your own life? 2. How do you weigh courage against prudence?

Chapter 13 - The Widow at Shandia

Central idea

Widowed at twenty-nine with a baby of ten months, she stayed in Ecuador and went on with the work.

Scriptures to revisit

Psalm 46:1-2; Isaiah 43:2; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4.

Reflection

1. How has God met you in grief? 2. Whom do you know who needs comfort now?

Chapter 14 - Through Gates of Splendor

Central idea

She told the story of the five men, and of Jim's life, in books that reached millions and turned grief into a public witness.

Scriptures to revisit

Psalm 145:4; Habakkuk 2:2; Hebrews 11:4.

Reflection

1. What story of God's work should you write down or tell? 2. How do we honour the dead without making legends of them?

Chapter 15 - Mintaka and Mankamu

Central idea

Two Waorani women came out of the forest and lived with her, while Dayuma taught her language to Rachel Saint.

Scriptures to revisit

Ruth 2:10-12; Hebrews 13:2; Romans 12:20-21.

Reflection

1. Who is the stranger at your door? 2. What would it cost you to welcome them?

Chapter 16 - Into the Forest

Central idea

In October 1958 she, Valerie and Rachel Saint went to live among the people who had killed her husband.

Scriptures to revisit

Genesis 12:1; Psalm 23:4; Matthew 5:44.

Reflection

1. Where is God asking you to go that you would rather not? 2. Whom do you need to forgive in practice, not only in word?

Chapter 17 - Among the Waorani

Central idea

Some of the killers became believers, but strain among the missionaries and her own questions led her to leave, and in 1963 to return home.

Scriptures to revisit

2 Corinthians 5:17; Acts 15:36-40; Philippians 4:2-3.

Reflection

1. How do you respond when Christian work is marred by conflict? 2. When is it right to leave?

Chapter 18 - The Questions She Would Not Hide

Central idea

Back in America, she refused to tidy up her experience, and in *No Graven Image* and other books she exposed the idols of missionary piety.

Scriptures to revisit

Psalm 62:8; Exodus 20:4-5; Isaiah 55:8-9.

Reflection

1. What questions have you been hiding from God? 2. Is there a God of your own making you need to give up?

Chapter 19 - Addison Leitch

Central idea

A second marriage, to a Presbyterian theologian, brought companionship and happiness, and then the long nursing of a husband dying of cancer.

Scriptures to revisit

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10; Psalm 90:10-12; Romans 12:15.

Reflection

1. How do you receive happiness that may not last? 2. Whom are you called to care for through illness?

Chapter 20 - Lars, and Magnolia

Central idea

A third marriage, a growing family, books on womanhood that drew praise and criticism, and a home life harder than anyone saw.

Scriptures to revisit

Psalm 68:6; Ephesians 5:21-33; Galatians 3:28.

Reflection

1. How do you weigh teaching on men and women under Scripture with fairness to those who disagree? 2. Is there anyone whose public face hides private burdens you could help to carry?

Chapter 21 - Gateway to Joy

Central idea

For thirteen years a daily radio programme told listeners they were loved with an everlasting love, and that small duties are holy.

Scriptures to revisit

Jeremiah 31:3; Deuteronomy 33:27; Luke 16:10.

Reflection

1. Do you believe you are loved with an everlasting love? 2. Which ordinary duty could you offer to God today?

Chapter 22 - The Next Thing

Central idea

An old poem's counsel to do the next duty, a conviction that suffering is never wasted, and a willingness to correct her own most famous story.

Scriptures to revisit

Ecclesiastes 9:10; Matthew 6:34; Ephesians 4:25.

Reflection

1. What is the next thing in front of you? 2. Is there a story you have told about God that you need to tell more truthfully?

Chapter 23 - The Long Twilight

Central idea

Dementia silenced the woman who had lived by words, and she was cared for at home until her death on 15 June 2015.

Scriptures to revisit

Isaiah 46:4; Psalm 71:9, 18; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.

Reflection

1. How do you think about growing old, and about losing your powers? 2. How can your church honour the elderly and those who care for them?

Chapter 24 - The Legacy of Elisabeth Elliot

Central idea

Her books, her family's publications and honest biographies have kept her witness alive, together with the places where her teaching must be weighed.

Scriptures to revisit

Hebrews 13:7; 1 Thessalonians 5:21; Hebrews 12:1-2.

Reflection

1. Whose faith have you been asked to follow, and how do you test it? 2. What would you want said about the end of your own life?

Appendix C: Chronology of the Life and Times of Elisabeth Elliot

"My times are in thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me."
— Psalm 31:15, KJV

The dates below are meant as orientation. Where the sources disagree, or where a date is approximate, that is noted.

1926 – Elisabeth Howard is born on 21 December in Brussels, Belgium, the second child of Philip E. Howard Jr. and Katharine Gillingham Howard, missionaries. The family returns to the United States while she is a baby.

1927 – Jim Elliot is born on 8 October in Portland, Oregon.

1930s – The Howards live in Germantown, Philadelphia, and in 1936 move to Moorestown, New Jersey. Philip Howard becomes editor of the *Sunday School Times*. The family grows to six children: Philip, Elisabeth, David, Virginia, Thomas and James. Summers are spent at Gale Cottage, Franconia, New Hampshire.

1939–1945 – The Second World War.

1941–1944 – Elisabeth attends Hampden DuBose Academy, a Christian boarding school in Florida.

1944–1948 – Wheaton College, Illinois, where she studies classical Greek with a view to Bible translation. She meets Jim Elliot, a friend of her

brother Dave.

1948–1952 – A restrained courtship, conducted largely by letter. Elisabeth studies at Prairie Bible Institute, Three Hills, Alberta, and trains in linguistics with the Summer Institute of Linguistics.

1949 – Jim Elliot graduates from Wheaton. On 28 October he writes in his journal that he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

1952 – Jim Elliot and Pete Fleming arrive in Ecuador in February. Elisabeth goes to Ecuador independently later in the year and works among the Colorado (Tsáchila) people at San Miguel de los Colorados. The Shandia station is destroyed by a flood.

1952–1953 – During her first year in Ecuador her language helper, Don Macario, is murdered; later a suitcase containing much of her language work is stolen.

1953 – Elisabeth and Jim are engaged in Quito in January. She learns Quichua in the eastern jungle. They marry in a civil ceremony in Quito on 8 October, Jim's twenty-sixth birthday, and live among the Quichua at Shandia and Puyupungu.

1955 – Valerie Elliot is born on 27 February. From about September or October Nate Saint and his companions make gift drops to a Waorani settlement.

1956 – On 3 January the five missionaries land on "Palm Beach", a sandbar on the Curaray. Friendly contact follows on 6 January. On 8 January Jim Elliot, Pete Fleming, Ed McCully, Roger Youderian and Nate Saint are speared to death. *Life* magazine publishes a photo essay. Elisabeth stays at Shandia and continues the Quichua work.

1957 – *Through Gates of Splendor* is published. Rachel Saint and Dayuma appear on the television programme *This Is Your Life* (June) and at Billy Graham's Madison Square Garden crusade (July). In November

two Waorani women, Mintaka and Mankamu, come out of the forest and live with Elisabeth.

1958 – *Shadow of the Almighty*, the life and journals of Jim Elliot, is published. In September Dayuma, Mintaka and Mankamu go back to their people and return about three weeks later with an invitation. In October (on the 8th, by the date usually given) Elisabeth, Valerie and Rachel Saint go with Dayuma and the two women to live among the Waorani, who call Elisabeth Gikari.

1961 – *The Savage My Kinsman* is published. Late in the year Elisabeth leaves the Waorani and returns to Quichua work.

1963 – Elisabeth and Valerie return to the United States and settle in Franconia, New Hampshire.

1965 – Kimo and Dyuwi baptise Steve and Kathy Saint, Nate Saint's children, in the Curaray.

1966 – *No Graven Image*, a novel, is published.

1968 – *The Liberty of Obedience* and *Who Shall Ascend*, a life of R. Kenneth Strachan, are published. Margaret Leitch, wife of the theologian Addison H. Leitch, dies.

1969 – On 1 January Elisabeth marries Addison Leitch. They move to Hamilton, Massachusetts, where he teaches theology at the newly formed Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

1973 – Addison Leitch dies of cancer on 17 September, aged sixty-four (a few sources give 18 September).

1974–1976 – Elisabeth serves as an adjunct professor at Gordon-Conwell.

1975 – *These Strange Ashes*, an account of her first year in Ecuador, is published.

1976 – *Let Me Be a Woman* is published. In the mid-1970s Valerie, engaged at the end of 1974, marries Walter Shepard; they later have eight

children.

1977 – In December Elisabeth marries Lars Gren (born 1936), a former salesman trained as a hospital chaplain, who had lodged in her home. They later live in Magnolia, Massachusetts.

1981 – *The Mark of a Man* is published. She is writer-in-residence at Gordon College.

1982 – *Discipline: The Glad Surrender* is published. *The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter* begins.

1984 – *Passion and Purity* is published.

1987 – *A Chance to Die: The Life and Legacy of Amy Carmichael* is published.

1988 – *Gateway to Joy* begins on Back to the Bible radio. *Loneliness* is published.

1989–1990 – *On Asking God Why* (1989) and *A Path Through Suffering* (1990).

1992 – *The Shaping of a Christian Family* is published.

1995–1996 – *Keep a Quiet Heart* (1995) and *Quest for Love* (1996). A new edition of *Through Gates of Splendor* (1996) adds an epilogue acknowledging that events among the Waorani had not unfolded simply.

Late 1990s–about 2000 – Her memory begins to fail, and she is diagnosed with dementia; accounts differ over the year.

2001 – *Gateway to Joy* ends after thirteen years.

2002–2003 – *Secure in the Everlasting Arms* (2002) and *Be Still My Soul* (2003).

2003–2004 – The newsletter ends (2003), and she gives up public speaking (2004).

2006 – *End of the Spear*, a feature film about the events of 1956 and the friendship of Steve Saint and Mincaye, is released.

2015 – Elisabeth Elliot dies at home in Magnolia on 15 June, aged eighty-eight. Her funeral is held on 23 June at Gordon College, Wenham, and a memorial service at Wheaton College on 26 July.

2019 – Valerie Elliot Shepard publishes *Devotedly*, from her parents' letters and journals. Kathryn T. Long publishes *God in the Rainforest*.

2020 – Ellen Vaughn publishes *Becoming Elisabeth Elliot*, the first volume of the authorised biography.

2023 – Vaughn's second volume, *Being Elisabeth Elliot*, and Lucy S. R. Austen's *Elisabeth Elliot: A Life* are published.

2025 – Lars Gren dies in Little Rock, Arkansas, on 2 April, aged eighty-eight.

Appendix D: Notes on Sources and Method

"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."
— 1 Thessalonians 5:21, KJV

About This Work

This book is an independent biography written by Ochorus. It is not published by, affiliated with, or endorsed by the family or estate of Elisabeth Elliot, or by any publisher, foundation, broadcaster or other organisation that holds rights in her writings and recordings. Her books, letters, newsletters and broadcasts remain in copyright, and they should be obtained from their publishers or borrowed from a library. Readers are warmly encouraged to do so. Nothing in this book can replace the clarity and directness of her own voice.

The book tells her life in its own words. It does not quote Elisabeth Elliot anywhere. Everything it reports of what she thought, felt, wrote or taught is paraphrased, no letter, journal entry, newsletter or broadcast of hers is reproduced, and her books are described rather than retold. The only words quoted, apart from Scripture, are these:

Jim Elliot's journal, 28 October 1949. His sentence about the man who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose, quoted once, in the chapter "Palm Beach".

"Doe the Nexte Thynge". The anonymous nineteenth-century poem she often cited, which is in the public domain: its refrain, in the chapters "The Widow at Shandia" and "The Next Thing", and its opening line, in "The Next Thing".

Amy Carmichael. Two brief phrases from her public-domain writing: the refrain of *If*, in the chapter "Hampden DuBose", and a phrase from the poem that gave *These Strange Ashes* its title, in "Macario, and a Stolen Suitcase".

Scripture. All Scripture is quoted from the King James Version.

Primary Sources

Elisabeth Elliot's own books are the first source for her life, and the most important are named in the chapters where they belong. *Through Gates of Splendor* (1957; new edition with an epilogue, 1996) tells the story of the five missionaries. *Shadow of the Almighty* (1958) is her life of Jim Elliot, built around his journals and letters, and she later edited *The Journals of Jim Elliot* (1978). *The Savage My Kinsman* (1961) records, chiefly in photographs, her time among the Waorani. *These Strange Ashes* (1975) describes her first year in Ecuador among the Colorados. *Passion and Purity* (1984) tells the story of her courtship with Jim, and *The Shaping of a Christian Family* (1992) describes the home in which she grew up. Her novel *No Graven Image* (1966) is not autobiography, but it draws closely on her own experience.

Valerie Elliot Shepard's *Devotedly: The Personal Letters and Love Story of Jim and Elisabeth Elliot* (2019) publishes a large selection of her parents' letters and journals from the years of their courtship and marriage.

Biographies and Studies

This book is particularly indebted to the following, which readers who want to go further will find rewarding:

Ellen Vaughn, *Becoming Elisabeth Elliot* (2020) and *Being Elisabeth Elliot* (2023). The authorised biography, written with access to her surviving journals and letters. The second volume is the fullest published account of her later years, including her marriages to Addison Leitch and Lars Gren.

Lucy S. R. Austen, *Elisabeth Elliot: A Life* (2023). An independent full-length biography based on long study of the sources.

Kathryn T. Long, *God in the Rainforest: A Tale of Martyrdom and Redemption in Amazonian Ecuador* (2019). A historian's account of the missionary encounter with the Waorani from the 1950s onward, giving full weight to the Waorani themselves and to the tensions among the missionaries.

Russell T. Hitt, *Jungle Pilot* (1959). The life of Nate Saint, drawing on his letters and diaries.

Olive Fleming Liefeld, *Unfolding Destinies*. The story of Pete Fleming and of the years after 1956, told by his widow.

Corrections and Disputed Points

The Waorani. The people who killed the five missionaries were widely called "Auca" in the 1950s, a Quichua word meaning roughly "savage", which they regarded as an insult. This book uses their own name, Waorani, except where the older label is part of a historical title such as Operation Auca.

The 1956 story. The early accounts, including Elisabeth Elliot's own, were written within months of the deaths and inevitably simplified a complicated history. Her 1996 epilogue, and the work of Long and others, have qualified them. Where later research differs from the first telling, this book follows the later research.

Addison Leitch. Most sources give 17 September 1973 as the date of his death, a few the 18th, and they differ on exactly when and where he and Elisabeth first met. The account given here keeps to what the sources agree on.

Lars Gren. Our knowledge of Elisabeth Elliot's third marriage rests largely on Ellen Vaughn's *Being Elisabeth Elliot*, which draws on the testimony of family and friends gathered after her death, because, as Vaughn reports, most of her journals from those years were destroyed. Lars Gren, who died in 2025, did not give his own account, and his view of the marriage is largely missing from the record. This book reports only what that published biography describes, attributes it to Vaughn, and records equally his many years of care for Elisabeth in her illness, without attempting to judge between them.

Her teaching on women. Her views on men, women, marriage and submission were embraced by many readers and criticised by others, including evangelicals who hold that Scripture teaches the equality of men and women in the home and the church. This book describes the debate but does not try to settle it; the teaching itself is weighed in the companion volume, *The Key Teachings of Elisabeth Elliot*.

Quotations attributed to her. Many sayings circulate under her name, and not all of them are hers. Readers who wish to quote her should check the words against her own books.

The Library She Loved

Several of the books that shaped Elisabeth and Jim Elliot are in the public domain and in the Ochorus library. Amy Carmichael's *Things as They Are* and *If* come from the missionary whose life Elisabeth later wrote. *The Life and Diary of David Brainerd* was a model for Jim Elliot's own devotion and for his journal. Hudson Taylor's *A Retrospect* tells the story of a missionary who learned, as she did, to trust God for the next step. Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ* and Brother Lawrence's *The Practice of the Presence of God* belong to the tradition of practical, daily devotion she commended. Jim Elliot also has an author page on Ochorus. All of these can be read freely there, alongside the companion volume *The Key Teachings of Elisabeth Elliot*.

Scripture

All Scripture quotations are from the Authorised (King James) Version, which is in the public domain.

© Ochorus. An Ochorus Original biography, free to read and share.

This edition was prepared by Ochorus, a free library of Christian classics.

Read it online, free, at https://ochorus.com/books/elisabeth-elliot-a-life/

More free classics at ochorus.com