

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

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The Consolation of Obedience

Early one Sunday morning in the mountains of North Carolina a group of conference speakers met as planned for prayer, but heard a shocking announcement. The son-in-law of that morning's speaker had been murdered in South America. There were many expressions of grief and sympathy, of course, and it was agreed almost unanimously that another speaker should be found for the worship service. "No," said the scheduled speaker quietly. He would want to carry out his responsibility. Objections, consternation, discussion followed.

"But I want to do it," said the man.

Surely it would not be right to expect him to do this, not after hearing such terrible news. All would wish to excuse him. All would understand. When the men had had their say, I ventured to suggest that perhaps there was one thing they did not understand—that in times of deepest suffering it is the faithful carrying out of ordinary duties that brings the greatest consolation. I had found it so, as have many others. The man delivered his message—a deepened and more powerful one.

Marj Saint's daily job was to maintain constant radio contact with her husband Nate, a jungle pilot. When he and four missionaries went into dangerous territory in Ecuador in 1956 Marj lost contact with her husband for the first time in all the years he had been flying. Through the suspense of four days we watched as she sat calmly, hour after anguished hour, by that shortwave radio, headphones on, notepad ready, maintaining contact with another jungle pilot, with an American air rescue party from Panama, with reporters from Quito and the U.S., and with the search party comprising Quichua Indians, missionaries, and Ecuadorian soldiers. She had a few other things to think about as well: her three children, us four wives and our children who were all staying in her house, not

to mention the people who poured in from all over, wanting to help. One missionary lady offered "a shoulder to cry on." Marj thanked her and said she hoped she would not need it. God was her mighty fortress and her routine work was real consolation. There was no turning away from her duties or from people simply because her own heart was sick and sore. She knew the truth of Romans 8:35-39 (NIV):

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?
Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine
or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:

"For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There is a great lesson tucked away in that mysterious book of Ezekiel. The word of the Lord came to the prophet, "Son of man, with one blow I am about to take away from you the delight of your eyes." Ezekiel was forbidden to indulge in any of the accepted forms of mourning. He obeyed. How could he? It is always possible to do what God directs us to do. Ezekiel wrote, "and in the evening my wife died. The next morning I did as I had been commanded" (Ez 24:15, 18, NIV).

I remember the consolation I had found in going about my work in Shandia when Jim died. There was twice as much to do as there had been when there were two of us. In my journal of November, 1973, about two months after the death of my second husband, Addison Leitch, I wrote:

"I find that routine is the best support for my soul. I can function with almost my customary efficiency and concentration, so long as I operate by habit—the sameness, ordinariness, and necessity are comforting. It is in the interruption of routine that I find myself beginning to disintegrate and turn inward. This is hazardous, and I have to take the reins firmly and say 'gid-dap!'"

It was the old watchword, DO THE NEXT THING. But how to know which, of all the pressing concerns,

is "the next thing"? As usual my friend George MacDonald has an answer:

"Your next duty is just to determine what your next duty is. Is there nothing you neglect? Is there nothing you know you ought not to do? You would know your duty if you thought in earnest about it, and were not ambitious of great things."

"Ah, then," responded she, "I suppose it is something very commonplace, which will make life more dreary than ever. That cannot help me."

"It will, if it be as dreary as reading the newspapers to an old deaf aunt. It will soon lead you to something more. Your duty will begin to comfort you at once, but will at length open the unknown fountain of life in your heart."

It is a principle of the spiritual life, discovered by many. Here is John Keble's version:

When sorrow all our heart would ask,
We need not shun our daily task,
And hide ourselves for calm;
The herbs we seek to heal our woe
Familiar by the pathway grow,
Our common air is balm.

Summertime in Strawberry Cove

"The lines have fallen unto me in pleasant places," wrote the psalmist, and my gratitude echoes his words. Strawberry Cove is a cul de sac with seven houses, just off Hesperus Avenue in the little town of Magnolia (too small to be on the map), in Massachusetts. Most of you older ones know Longfellow's poem, "The Wreck of the Hesperus," the story of the schooner Hesperus, that "sailed the wintry sea," and was wrecked on the rock named Norman's Woe, lying beyond my vision to the east as I sit at my desk.

I look down a grassy bank, humpy with the ceaseless industry of countless woodchucks over countless years. They dig a vast labyrinth of tunnels, piling huge mounds of earth on the bank. I enjoy watching them—obese furry brown creatures with blunt snouts, short tails, and short legs with powerful digging forepaws. They waddle or scurry or lazily sun themselves. They used to be my friends. I thought they were awfully cute until they began neatly nipping off *every single* petunia in our teensy garden. Some of the charm now seems to have perished.

At the bottom of the bank are great sheets of rock and a jumble of awesome red-brown boulders surrounding a lovely little tide pool, so crystal clear that I can see straight to its dark red and bright green floor.

Once I spotted an Atlantic salmon that had got himself marooned there when the tide ebbed.

Our house, which faces due south from Cape Ann, sits about sixty feet above a wide expanse of what I call ocean (it has waves and swells and seagulls and sea-going vessels of all sizes) but is more accurately named Massachusetts Bay. It glitters and flashes in the sunlight. A billion diamonds dance. The lobster buoys swing and dip on the swells, and on summer weekends we see the little red flags which mark the presence of scuba divers beneath. Early in the morning we hear the soft thub-thub of the lobster boats as they slip into the Cove. We watch the lobster men pull their "pots" (traps), remove the catch, and fling the rotten bait to the wheeling flocks of screaming gulls who always trail them.

The ocean tempers the climate in both winter and summer. It is ten degrees warmer in winter and cooler in summer than it was in Hamilton, where we used to live, twelve miles inland. So we seldom have more than a dozen or so really *hot* days. On one or two of these I may venture down to the rocks with my snorkel. It must be high tide and fairly calm, otherwise one is flung against wicked barnacles, making it hazardous either to get in or out of the water.

The water is bone-chilling, but oh, what exquisite mysteries I discover as I put my goggled face into the water! I am instantly in a different world, a magic one, a silent one, and I forget the ice water and gaze at the swaying forests of seaweed, the sunlit colors of starfish and rock, the shining silver of an occasional fish. It is not to be compared, of course, with the Great Barrier Reef where I once snorkeled. The cold North Atlantic is not a tropical paradise, but it holds more beauty than one can fully bear.

We have a picture window in the living room. Over it is a wooden motto, made for me by one of Amy Carmichael's "babies," an old lady who spent her days there in Dohnavur, India, beautifully lettering Scripture texts. This one has Psalm 95:5, "The sea is His and He made it," a simple and completely staggering statement.

God made it. He dried it up with a rebuke. He rolled

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it back. He spoke to it and the waves calmed. He stirs it up like a pot of ointment (Jb 41:31). He causes it to teem with creatures beyond number (Ps 104:25). He confounded Job with questions such as,

"Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, when I said, 'This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt'?"

"Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep?" (Jb 38:8-11, 16, NIV)

Our Lord Jesus loved the sea. He sat by it and taught the people beside it. He once cooked breakfast on the shore. To me it is a daily gift, a joy, a ceaseless reminder of the majesty and beauty of my Heavenly Father.

And shall I write of those winter storms? Sometime, perhaps. *Those* are something else!

Elisabeth's Summer Soup

Put in blender:

1/2 can consommé	1 seeded, unpeeled cucumber
2 tbsp. sour cream	
8 oz. tomato sauce	1/2 cup water (more if needed)
2 thin slices sweet onion	
1 tsp. horseradish	Salt if needed.

Chill thoroughly. Makes 4 servings.

Not Mad at God

Jim O'Donnell was a very ambitious and successful businessman who described himself as self-centered and indifferent to spiritual things until he met Christ through a man who rode the same commuter train to Boston. Jim came across my broadcast, *Gateway to Joy*, and wrote me a letter. He and his wife Lizzie took us to dinner and we became instant friends.

With a desire to to be a *servant* Jim gave up his work in Boston and moved to Huntington, Indiana to teach in a small Christian college. Not many months later they learned that Lizzie has breast cancer, "dangerous, virulent, and advanced." That was last January, and by the time this newsletter appears much will have taken place. But he gave me permission to quote from his letter, a very unusual one, I think:

How could something so serious strike so rapidly? And selfishly I ask, "Why sweet Lizzie?"... We believe strongly in the power of prayer. We are not mad at God. (It was God who has given me Lizzie for the past twenty-eight years.) Our faith has not been shaken, though this is a time of severe testing.... We must learn how to to be faithful people in this new assignment, one we certainly never would have asked for but one which can still serve to bless us, our Creator, and others.

Yes, there is fear; there is sadness; there is a whole new vocabulary we are coming to know, one we never would have wanted to know anything about. There are lots of tears. But there have been extraordinary blessings amid the darkness....

We don't believe this is an accident, and we don't believe this is not "of God." We live in a fallen world, where all of us—and creation in general—fall short, because of sin, of what God intended for us; and illness and crime and cruelty are just reminders of that "fallenness." We trust in God's sovereignty over this world and for our lives amid this sickness. God can heal. But we also trust that even serious illness can serve God's good and holy purposes to arouse love and care in others, to turn our trust from ourselves to Him, and maybe spur some to reflect on what truly is important in life.

His letter ends with eight wonderful verses about suffering in 2 Corinthians 1:3-11. Look them up, reflect on them.

A later note tells me Jim was kept from fear and despair by the thought of God's *assignments*. "He makes our assignments... a wonderful teaching planted in this growing soul." Psalm 16:5 is an expression of this truth.

C.S. Lewis said that God whispers to us in our joys, speaks to us in our conscience, and *shouts* to us in our pain.

Note from Lars

Thank you for your prayers. The Lord is merciful. Doctor says "operation perfect." Results: 80 percent now. Will have to wait to see what happens with 20 percent. Operation does not improve sight, only lessens pressure, may forestall further deterioration. So, with gratitude, I'll bumble along, bumping my head every now and then, and doing what the doctors tell me to do.

Prayer

- Please pray for the O'Donnells.
- Please pray for Paul and Karen Hill and their three little children. Paul, a former pastor, is on Death Row in a Florida state prison for killing an abortion doctor and his bodyguard. I have just received letters from Paul and Karen where they describe their wholehearted commitment to Christ. They are trusting Him for all that Paul's situation means for their family.

Recommended Reading

Glenda Revell: *Glenda's Story: Led by Grace*. The beautiful testimony of a girl who never thought of herself as a victim, although her father was unknown, her mother despised her, and her stepfather abused her. Her sufferings, she said, were commonplace, but the Savior who rescued her is extraordinary. He brought light out of darkness, joy out of sorrow, peace out of pain. Available from *Gateway to Joy*, 1-800-759-4569. Price: \$10.49, including postage.

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Are you moving? Getting married? Leaving school? *Don't forget to send us your change of address.* The post office DOES NOT FORWARD third class mail like the Newsletter. *Please remove your address label below and send it with your new address to: The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter, Post Office Box 7711, Ann Arbor, MI 48107-7711.*

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Servant Ministries, Inc.
Post Office Box 7711
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48107-7711

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Travel Schedule July - October 1995

July 9 Asbury Grove, Hamilton, Mass.; Elisabeth Meyer, (508) 468-1629.

July 20 Denver, Colo.; Christian Booksellers Association luncheon, 1-800-252-1950.

August 24-27 Serra Negra, Sao Paulo, Brazil; Southern Baptist Missionary women's retreat, Sharon Fairchild, Travessa Jaicos 18 Tijuca, 20521-280 Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, (021) 254-6174.

September 8-9 Wentzville, Mo.; First Baptist Church women's retreat, Nancee Dutchik, (314) 625-1898; church phone (314) 327-8696.

September 10-11 Highland Park, Mich.; Revival Tabernacle, (313) 869-0140.

September 22-23 North Kingston, R.I.; women's retreat, Bonnie Barnett, 401 Davisville Rd., North Kingston, RI, 02852.

October 6-16 Speaking tour in Norway.

October 21 Peoria, Ill.; Illinois Prison Ministry, (309) 673-6794.

October 22-24 Bloomington, Ind.; Evangelical Community Church, (812) 332-0502.

October 26-28 Seattle, Wash.; Ligonier Ministries' conference; Laura Grace Alexander (407) 333-4244.

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