

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

March/April 1989

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There Are No Accidents, Says Judy

My friend Judy Squier of Portola Valley, California, is one of the most cheerful and radiant women I know. I met her first in a prayer meeting at the beginning of a conference. She was sitting in a wheel chair, and I noticed something funny about her legs. Later that day I saw her with no legs at all. In the evening she was walking around with crutches. Of course I had to ask her some questions. She was born with no legs, she had artificial ones which she used sometimes, but they were tiresome, she said (laughing) and she often left them behind. When I heard of a little baby boy named Brandon Scott, born without arms or legs, I asked if she would write to his parents. She did.

"The first thing I would say is that all that this entails is at least one hundred times harder on the parents than the child. A birth defect by God's grace does not rob childhood of its wonder, nor is a child burdened by high expectations. Given a supportive, creative, and loving family, I know personally that I enjoyed not a less-than-average life nor an average life, but as I've told many, my life has been not ordinary but extraordinary.

"I am convinced without a doubt that a loving Heavenly Father oversees the creative miracles in the inner sanctum of each mother's womb (Psalm 139), and that in His sovereignty there are no accidents.

"What the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the Creator calls a butterfly.' As humanity we see only the imperfect, underside of God's tapestry of our lives. What we judge to be 'tragic—the most dreaded thing that could happen,' I expect we'll one day see as the awesome reason for the beauty and uniqueness of

our life and our family. I think that's why James 1:2 is a favorite verse of mine. Phillips' translation put it this way: 'When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your lives, my brothers, don't resent them as intruders but welcome them as friends.'

"I love Joni Eareckson Tada's quote. When I saw it on the front of *Moody Monthly*, October 1982, I was convinced she'd penned the words for my epitaph. Now my husband is aghast to hear me say I want it on my tombstone! Glory be!

People with disabilities are God's best visual aids to demonstrate who He really is. His power shows up best in weakness. And who by the world's standards is weaker than the mentally or physically disabled? As the world watches, these people persevere. They live, love, trust, and obey Him. Eventually the world is forced to say, "How great their God must be to inspire this kind of loyalty."

"The above are my hurried soul thoughts. I can't think too deeply with three little women popping in and out of this letter-writing. But I give you a moment of down-to-earth real life which I am good at, since I am a very 'earthy' person.

"Being Christian didn't shield my family from the pain and tears that came with my birth defect. In fact, ten years ago when David and I interviewed our parents for a Keepsake Tape, I was stunned to hear my mother's true feelings. I asked her to tell the hardest thing in her life. Her response: 'the day Judy Ann was born and it still is. . . .' And yet when we as a family look back over the years, our reflections are invariably silenced by the *wonder* of God's handiwork. Someday I hope to put it in a book and I know it will be to the glory of God.

"Getting married and becoming a mother were dreams I never dared to dream, but God, the doer

of *all* miracles intended that my life be blessed with an incredible husband and three daughters. Emily is nine, Betsy will soon be seven, and Naphtalie Joy is four. I've decided that every handicapped person needs at least one child. They are fantastic helpers and so willing to let me 'borrow their legs' when I need help.

"Well, my friends, I will close for now. Friends and family do care so much, and you as a family have been chosen in a special way to display His unique MasterWork. I pray that your roots of faith will grow deep down into the faithfulness of God's Loving Plan, that you will exchange your inadequacy for the Adequacy of Jesus' resurrection power, and that you will be awed as you witness the fruits of the Spirit manifested in your family."

Why the Newsletter?

I began writing the newsletter in 1982 because kind people of the Word of God Community in Ann Arbor, Michigan, suggested that I write one, and offered all their facilities for the carrying out of the idea.

Now that my radio program, "Gateway to Joy," is in its sixth month I have bethought me again of the need for or the wisdom of continuing the letter. I have, after all, a new channel of communication with many more people than are on my mailing list. Maybe that's enough. But then, maybe radio listeners will be wanting a newsletter. I'm in a quandary.

To call it a "newsletter" is a bit misleading, I admit. It's nothing like a proper one. It doesn't keep you abreast of much of anything. It isn't "relevant" in the popular sense. But I take refuge in C.S. Lewis's remark, "All that is not eternal is eternally out of date," and I try always to include things eternal. I suppose the heart of the matter is a burning desire, amounting perhaps to a compulsion akin to that of the psalmist's ("My heart is teeming with a good word; / I utter what I have framed concerning the King" Ps 45:1; Kay). Often I have some treasure to share which I didn't frame—treasures from the pens of long-dead saints. Because it's getting harder and harder to find some of the writings which have nourished my soul, I give you tastes so that you can ransack old bookstores and feast on spiritual food much more substantial than many contemporary offerings.

I had wanted to give you something for an Easter meditation. Nothing I could frame comes close to this jewel from George Herbert, born in Wales in 1593.

The Agonie

Philosophers have measur'd mountains,
Fathom'd the depths of seas, of states, and kings;
Walk'd with a staffe to heav'n, and traced
fountains:

But there are two vast, spacious things,
The which to measure it doth more behove;
Yet few there are that sound them,—Sinne
and Love.

Who would know Sinne, let him repair
Unto Mount Olivet; there shall he see
A Man so wrung with pains, that all His hair,
His skinne, His garments bloudie be.
Sinne is that presse and vise, which forceth pain
To hunt his cruell food through ev'ry vein.

Who knows not love, let him assay
And taste that juice which, on the cross, a pike
Did set again abroach; then let him say
If ever he did taste the like.
Love is that liquour sweet and most divine,
Which my God feels as bloud, but I as wine.

Too Many Children?

When I learned that my daughter Valerie was expecting number five, my insides tied themselves in knots.

Val and Walt were both very peaceful about it, willing to receive this child as they had received the others—as a gift from the Lord, remembering His words, "Whoever receives this child in my name receives me" (Lk 9:48). But my imagination ran to the future and its seeming impossibilities—"Poor dear Val. She has her hands more than full. What *will* she do with five?" Before she was married Valerie had told me that she hoped the Lord would give her six. I had smiled to myself, thinking she would prob-

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ably revise that number after the first three or four. Practical considerations rose like thunderclouds in my mind. Money. Another room to be built onto the house. Homeschooling (Valerie was teaching two already). How would the new child receive the attention he needed? *Etc., etc.*

Then I began to look at the advantages. I was one of six children myself, and loved growing up in a big family. Children learn early what it means to help and to share, to take responsibility and to make sacrifices, to give place to others, to cooperate and deny themselves. Why all this turmoil in my soul? Well, because I loved my child! She was tired! Her hands were full! Maybe later, maybe when the others were old enough to help more, maybe . . . *O Lord!*

I tried to talk to God about it. Breakfast time came, we ate, washed dishes, school began in the children's schoolroom, and I went to my room, my heart churning. What does one do?

I write this because troubled young women have come to me not understanding their mothers' reactions to the news of another baby. Was it resentment? Did they not love the grandchildren they had? Why would they not want more? Was it nothing but a meddlesome yen to run their children's lives? Was it a revelation of a worse attitude—an unwillingness to let God be God?

It was this last question that I knew I must wrestle with as I knelt in the bedroom. Most things that trouble us deeply come down to that. I had to bring each of my wrong responses definitely and specifically to God, lay them honestly before Him (He already knew exactly what I was thinking), confess my pride and silliness, and then, just as definitely *accept* His sovereign and loving will for Valerie, for her family, and for me as the granny. Only God knew how many countless others, even in future generations, He had in mind in bringing this particular child into the Shepard family. He was granting this family the privilege of offering sacrifices for Him, participating in His grand designs. YES, LORD. Your will is my conscious choice. Nothing more. Nothing less. Nothing else.

Even though the feelings don't evaporate at once, they have been surrendered, and the Lord knows what to do with them. Mine had to be surrendered over and over again, but He took them, and over the next few days He transformed them. And when the news of Number

Six was broken to me last spring, I was able to say *Thank You, Lord*, and to add that tiny unknown one to my prayer list. If you saw the last Newsletter, you know of the birth of Evangeline Mary November 9, lovingly welcomed by all.



The Shepard family, January 1989: Val and Walt, Evangeline 2 months, Colleen 2, Walter III 11, Christiana 7, Jim Elliot 4, Elisabeth (seated) 9.

Thankful for Income Tax

"I actually was thankful that I had to withdraw money from saving and pay a boatload," wrote Liz Armstrong. "Not that I am in agreement with how the government spends the money, but I am thankful that God has gifted me with this privilege to live in a *free* country. I remember a dusty evening I had when I was in Morocco, meeting with Christians in a back alley. We sat down for a meal, had a Bible study, and were told, 'Don't say much when you leave here tonight; there will be a man by our door in a trenchcoat smoking his pipe. Just walk by and say nothing.' 'My, my, my,' I thought to myself as I remembered my youth when we would jam into a car and head out for a soda or something. To live in a *free* country—well, taxes don't seem so traumatic. Oh, for this joy of pressing Christ into all we touch!"

Recommended Reading: *The Mother at Home*, The Rev. John S.C. Abbott, written in 1833. Sound wisdom on parental responsibility, teaching obedience in a calm and loving way, maternal authority, a mother's difficulties, and more. Available for \$7.40 (includes postage) from Grace Abounding Ministries, Inc., P.O. Box 25, Sterling, VA 22170.

Prayer Requests

- For the preparation and delivery of radio talks—that I deliver God's message, not mere sweet nothings;
- for the listeners, that they may hear and heed what God wants to say to them;
- for Jan Anderson, originator, producer, director, and announcer of Gateway to Joy;
- for the Lord's going before us as we prepare for the European trip in June. We will be in some places where the Word is not always allowed much freedom.

Keep in Touch

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.*

Travel Schedule March-May 1989

March 30, April 1 Camp Manitoqua, IL; Christian Women's Retreat, Mrs. Bea Porter, (312) 754-7958.

April 2, 3 Wellington, FL; Women in the Church, Mrs. Barbara Abril, (407) 793-0899.

April 4 Ft. Lauderdale, FL; Westminster Academy Auxiliary, (365) 771-4600.

April 12 Byfield, MA; Parish Church.

April 27, 28 Lancaster, PA; Fellowship of Christian Assemblies, Carl Johnson, (914) 634-7828.

April 29 Westerville, OH; Hosanna Praise Gathering, Susan Zartman, (614) 431-8222.

May 3 Chula Vista, CA; Evangelical Free Church (619) 421-7733.

May 4 Bellflower, CA; Christian School, Mrs. Laura Williams, 9537 Linden Street.

May 6 Big Bear, CA; PCA women's conference (same contact as above).

May 7 Aliso Creek Presbyterian Church; The Rev. Walter Shepard.

May 15 Liberty Corner, PA; women's day, (215) 332-1676.

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