



# Heaven Begins Now

a Serialization of

## All The Way To Heaven

by Elizabeth Sherrill

The past, the present, the future -- heaven enfolds them all. *Heaven behind me . . .* All the way we walk before we know that the road itself is God. For me this



## Heaven Now

part of the journey lasted more than thirty years. I was given hints of the truth aplenty, but I could not read them. It's only in retrospect that I know that every event of my life was a step on the Way that's been heaven all along.

*Heaven around me . . .* It's that part of the journey when dimly, wonderingly, always imperfectly, we catch sight of those streets of gold right beneath our feet. It's the strange, contradictory world of grief and joy, despair and hope, where I've lived these last forty years.

*Heaven before me . . .* This is the landscape where we'll spend longest, and about which we now know least. It's the heaven we'll experience after death, where all we can now be sure of is that Jesus has gone ahead to prepare a place.

Heaven behind, around, before. . . no time or place that is not heaven.

### Part 1: HEAVEN BEHIND ME

*You trace my journeys and my resting places. . .  
You press upon me behind and before. Psalm 1*

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;  
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;  
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways  
Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears  
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.  
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.  
But with unhurrying chase,  
And unperturbed pace,  
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,  
They beat-and a Voice beat  
More instant than the Feet,  
"All things betray thee, who betrayest Me."

Francis Thompson  
*The Hound of Heaven*

## **The Three-Year-Old**

Heaven behind me . . . the journey unaware. The trip we understand only in looking back.

In the summer of 1959, John and I traveled with our three children twelve thousand miles by car, collecting story material from Delaware to Texas to Alaska. In those pre-seat belt days, the back of the station wagon held a mattress where the kids could stretch out. Three-year-old Liz was usually the first to clamber over the backseat and lie down. Scott, age eight, and Donn, five, would continue a while longer to stare at the passing countryside.

"Wow! Look at that long freight train!"

If the spectacle sounded enticing enough, there'd be a stirring in the back of the car. Slowly disentangling herself from books and teddy bears, Liz would sit up. By then of course, the train or the galloping horse or the drive-in shaped like a giant ice-cream cone would be far behind us.

And from the back of the car would come a small puzzled voice.

"Where?"

I felt the same frustration when, in my mid-twenties, I met my first

"religious" people. They were forever seeing God in the passing scene.  
"Wasn't it wonderful how God worked that out!"

Where was this wonder-worker so plainly visible to others? Audible too, apparently. God often "told" them this or that. Listening to their matter-of-fact assertions, I felt like a three-year-old in a moving car. Why couldn't I detect these things?

## **Journey's Goal**

Nor, at age three, did Liz understand the purpose of the long trip. A destination like Independence, Missouri, meant nothing. For Liz, the journey was a series of unrelated events. Some bad -- the restaurant where she left her crayon box behind. Some good -- the motel with the swimming pool.

Today, looking at the photo album of that summer, Liz can reconstruct the route. Today she knows we went to Independence to interview President Truman. She can see a picture of herself in a yellow dress, standing beside him on a white frame porch.

Charting the early stages of any spiritual journey is a lot like what Liz has to do to make sense of that trip in 1959. Today I know that Jesus is the destination. And because he is also the Way, I know that the goal and the journey are one. With hindsight I can reconstruct the route by which we've come. Line up seemingly unconnected events along the path that is also a Person.