



# Heaven Begins Now

a Serialization of

## All The Way To Heaven

by Elizabeth Sherrill

John's temporary job at *Guideposts*, meanwhile, was proving more intriguing than he expected -- meeting interesting people, learning about their lives, even if he didn't buy into their religious concepts. The small editorial staff was overworked, and by Scott's first birthday I was doing interviews for the magazine on weekends, writing them up at night.



In 1954, when our second son, Donn, was nine months old, we moved to a circle of identical small homes in Mt. Kisco, a New York suburb another twenty miles farther north. It was there in the fall of 1955, pregnant with our third child, that I reached the crisis point. Part of it may have been hormonal, part was certainly grief over my father's death the year before, part an ever-growing sense of inadequacy.

Already seeing myself a failure as a housewife, I began to believe I was failing as a mother too. As much as I hated ironing and mending and cleaning, I loved everything directly to do with our two little boys. Feeding, watching, teaching, learning from Donn and Scott, brought me the most intense joy I'd ever experienced.

### The Attic Room

But more and more often out of its cavern crept the old dragon of self-rejection. *Me?* Responsible for the nurture of these eager, shining, beautiful beings? As my depression deepened, it seemed to me that anyone and everyone else -- the passerby on the street -- had more to give our children than I did.

At last the dragon chased me upstairs to a small room in the partly finished attic, where there was a daybed and an actual door. And there I lay while a succession of baby-sitters managed, I was convinced, so much better than I could. In fact, to me, my death seemed the way to remove my potentially harmful presence. The memory he can't shake, John says, is of coming home from New York each night to find me in that attic bed, face turned to the wall.

More than a bed, I think now that the attic couch was a crib into which I tried to crawl, an unconscious reversion to that ten-month-old infant. Tragically, in crying out for a missing mother, I took a mother away from my own children. At the time, it was simply inconceivable to me that I had value for anyone. How often ever since, though, I've looked back and grieved for the hurt to two little boys! Scott was in kindergarten by then, but for two-year-old Donnie, the center of his world was on the other side of that closed door.

## The Shopping Cart

By the time Liz was born in February 1956, Dr. Kazan had found medication that allowed me to function, and the worst of the crisis was over.

It was a shaky equilibrium at first, and the place of greatest threat was the supermarket. Simply stepping inside, I'd feel the panic rise. So many choices! Shelf after shelf, aisle after aisle... In the indecisiveness that marks depression, I could find no reason to prefer one item over another. I would pause and consider, walk on and return, grab something, put it back, select something else.

When the pounding of my heart grew too strong, I'd lift Liz from the shopping cart, seize Donn by the hand, and flee to the closed-in safety of the car. Beside me on the seat, Donn, two-and-a-half, would regard me solemnly:

"We forgot the food again, Mommy"

Dr. Kazan made a commonsense suggestion that at least kept us from starving: "Find a small grocery store." I located an out-of-the-way place where a taciturn clerk retrieved orders with pincers on a pole from tall shelves behind a counter.

"Got no vegetable soup."

"Well . . ." (oh, the relief from deciding!) "just give me what you have."

I developed a repertoire of such devices to get me through routine tasks. Unable to confront the blank page at the start of a new story, I took to writing between the typed lines of previous work. I ran errands when stores would be emptiest, pretended a toothache because I could not smile. I was getting through the days, but it was hardly living.