



# Heaven Begins Now

a Serialization of

## All The Way To Heaven

by Elizabeth Sherrill

My mother's illness – and no doubt that groan at the demands of an energetic toddler! – continued for the remaining six months of her pregnancy. As for Daddy, he was coping with his own stress. While they were in Paris, a cable from faraway California had informed them of the sudden death of the mother he adored.



## The Portrait

I wish I had known Daddy's mother! Her portrait hangs in our living room, a dignified white-haired woman with warm brown eyes behind rimless glasses. I often stop before it, wishing I could talk to her.

"Adored" is too mild a word for the way all seven of her children felt about Isabelle Campbell Schindler. "She was a saint," my nonreligious father would say. Poor most of her life -- she was the one requesting liver "for the cat" -- Daddy remembered her as the most giving person he ever knew, forever bringing a hungry stranger home for a meal or a month of meals. Setting another plate on the table though her own might go empty. Making up another bed even if she had to sleep sitting in a chair.

A reformer, she frequented women's prisons, teaching sewing to the prostitutes who made up the bulk of the inmates. She conceived the idea, radical in turn-of-the-century America, that it was not wantonness that drove these women onto the streets, but hunger. If they were taught a saleable skill, she argued with wardens and police, they would not be forced, on the day they were released, to return to their old trade.

Daddy was devastated by his mother's death. Retracing my journey in those early years, I see my parents coping with their own physical and emotional crises. I see my brother, Donn, born in November 1929, just after the stock market crash. Of financial hardship I was too young to be conscious. But I was very aware that an all-eclipsing newcomer now dominated my small world.

### The Loner

A man that looks on glass,  
On it may stay his eye,  
Or, if he pleaseth, through it pass,  
And then the heav'n espy.

George Herbert

If Donn really did get more attention as we grew up, it was simply that the culture of the time placed more importance on boys. My childhood struggles were the common ones of any era – an older child feeling supplanted, one sibling believing another the favorite – which children handle in their various ways.

Mine was to live behind an imaginary door. The bolt was on the inside, to be opened, if at all, to one person at a time. To be one-of-a-group held a nameless terror. Paradoxically, perhaps, I was also a leader-- president of the high school drama club, chairman of the war bond drive, editor of the school magazine. Leadership provided a kind of separation.

To maintain my status-apart within the classroom, I carried on for fourteen years a secret competition. This race with only one runner seems so sad to me today that I can hardly bear to look back at it. It began in the third grade, the first one in which test scores were given. If I got the best marks in the class, I would retain my isolation!

From age eight through my last college class at age twenty-two, I ran this self-imposed marathon, no matter how unappealing the terrain. I hated dissecting frogs, I loved reading. But driven by demons I didn't understand, I needed to be best in *every* subject. On the first day of school I'd appraise my classmates, as kids unerringly do. If there was a "competitor," unaware though he or she was, I'd throw myself into such stupefyingly dull tasks as memorizing chemical tables.

In those war years, students who did well in math were offered scholarships by technology schools. I remember telling a bewildered r, "But I *hate* math!"

Those who ran in an earthly race, said St. Paul, do it to receive a prize that withers away. To run a phantom race for a prize I didn't want ... this is the journey without road signs.