

This is a complete transcript of the oral history interview **Elisabeth Elliot Gren (CN 278, T2)** for the Billy Graham Center Archives. No spoken words which were recorded are omitted. In a very few cases, the transcribers could not understand what was said, in which case [unclear] was inserted. Also, grunts and verbal hesitations such as “ah” or “um” are usually omitted. Readers of this transcript should remember that this is a transcript of spoken English, which follows a different rhythm and even rule than written English.

. . . Three dots indicate an interruption or break in the train of thought within the sentence of the speaker.

. . . . Four dots indicate what the transcriber believes to be the end of an incomplete sentence.

( ) Word in parentheses are asides made by the speaker.

[ ] Words in brackets are comments made by the transcriber.

This transcript was created by Robert Shuster and Kerry Cox and was completed in in October 1990.

**Please note:** This oral history interview expresses the personal memories and opinions of the interviewee and does not necessarily represent the views or policies of the Billy Graham Center Archives or Wheaton College.



**Collection 278, Tape 2. Oral history interview with Elisabeth Elliot Gren by Robert Shuster on March 26, 1985.**

**SHUSTER:** This is an oral history interview with Mrs. Elisabeth Howard Gren for the Missionary Sources Collection of Wheaton College. This interview was conducted by Robert Shuster at 1:30 pm in the offices of the Billy Graham Center. Well, why don't we start with a little bit of your family background? I know you were born in Belgium while your parents were with the Belgian Gospel Mission. How did they get involved with that work?

**ELLIOT:** [Mrs. Gren retained the name of Elisabeth Elliot for her written works and that is the name used in this interview, since she was best known under it.] I'm not really sure where my father met Mr. Ralph Norton, who was the founder of the Belgian Gospel Mission, but I have...all I know is, they had both offered themselves to the Lord for foreign mission service before they were married and had decided by the time they got married that it was Belgium they were going to, so that was their honeymoon trip, as it were. And they spent five years in Belgium, during which time two of us were born. And when I was five months old, my father had received a call to come back to the States to be associate editor of *The Sunday School Times*, which was a family newspaper, just about the only nondenominational Christian magazine in this country, I believe, in it's day. It was founded by my great grandfather, Henry Clay Trumbull. My grandfather, Philip E. Howard, was president of the company. My great uncle Charles G. Trumbull, author of a number of books (including a little booklet called, "The Life That Wins," which has had a very wide readership) he was editor at the time and wanted my father to come and be his associate. So he accepted that call and came back to the States.

**SHUSTER:** So, since you left at five months.... Well, do you have any personal remembrances or any family anecdotes from the period when your parents were in Belgium?

**ELLIOT:** Certainly no personal remembrances, not from when I was five months old. We lived in Philadelphia. That...those were my earliest recollections, growing up in the city of Philadelphia.

**SHUSTER:** What about family recollections of the period? Was it...

**ELLIOT:** Of my childhood?

**SHUSTER:** ...a great influence...? No, no, of...of the family's time in Belgium.

**ELLIOT:** Oh.

**SHUSTER:** Was it something you used to talk about?

**ELLIOT:** Well, we used to hear, yes. They...my parents often talked about it. My older brother remembered it fairly well. He was three years old when he came to this country and he had learned to speak French, of course. I guess my main impression that I gained from their stories was that they were living in a pretty, shall we say, austere kind of apartment. I think it was about

the fourth or fifth floor, walk-up, no running water, had to carry the water up and the slop water down. They were living on a shoestring, naturally, being missionaries. My mother had come from a fairly well-to-do home, so it was quite a new experience for her, for in her home they had two black cooks and a butler and she had really never seen the inside of a kitchen and they always said that my father was the only one that knew how to cook when they got married and what he knew how to cook was coffee and oatmeal. So that was a fairly limited menu and my mother went to the store one day in Belgium to buy a week's groceries and she saw a very beautiful piece of salmon, so she inquired the price and her French was not good enough for her to understand exactly what the price was and she managed to miss a zero that was in there somewhere. So she went ahead and bought it and when she learned what the price really was when she went to pay, it took almost the entire week's grocery money, but she was too proud to admit her mistake, so she said they ate delicious salmon and almost nothing else that week. The milk was delivered by dogcart. You had to go down to the street with your vessel and buy the milk from the man who came around with the cart that was pulled by big Belgian dogs. And they did Sunday school work and tent evangelism and visiting and that sort of thing. And because Belgium was a ninety-nine percent Catholic country, they had a very...they took a very dim view of Roman Catholicism. They were missionaries to the Catholics. So it goes without saying that we grew up with a very strong prejudice against Catholics. It was very...it would have been very hard for us to imagine there could be any Christian among them. I think that about exhausts the stories that come to mind at the moment.

**SHUSTER:** How would you describe your parents, starting with your mother?

**ELLIOT:** Very disciplined people, both of them. My mother was a model of efficiency and organization. She reared six children. She always had a mother's helper. It was simply taken for granted in her stratum of society that a woman could not possibly manage without some kind of household help and of course in those days it was a lot easier to get and we had a succession of mother's helpers that were usually liabilities rather than assets. I think they were paid something like two or three dollars a week and they lived in. Some of them were Bible school girls that were gone a good part of the day, but we have a long series of stories on some of the disasters that happened because of them. But my mother was extremely meticulous about the way the household was run. She was extremely neat and orderly and when she said that breakfast was at seven and lunch at twelve and supper at six she meant that breakfast was at one minute of seven and one minute of twelve and maybe two minutes of six, and there was no toleration at all for anyone being late. We were taught that lateness is stealing other people's most precious possession so you were not allowed to be late. My father was the same kind of person, just almost compulsive about being on time, and he regularly commuted to Philadelphia from the area where we lived. He commuted into his office by train which meant there wasn't any leeway as to when he left the house and.... We were made to get up at a certain hour in the morning in order to be at breakfast at a certain hour in order to have family devotions at a certain time because my father took the train every morning at the same time. So, we had family devotions every morning after breakfast in which we sang a hymn, and we went straight through hymn-books singing one hymn per day with all stanzas. My parents both played the piano so they would take turns. One would play and the rest of us would sing. And my father read the Bible. Very often he was reading from Hurlbut's *Story of the Bible* because with a span of sixteen years

between the youngest and the oldest of the six of us, there was always a child that needed to have something simplified. So he would read the Bible, then we would all kneel to pray and my father led in prayer. We joined in the Lord's Prayer at the end. And that was strict routine. We didn't skip that for anything, including the most exciting day of the year when we went to New Hampshire for our vacation and left at five o'clock in the morning, we didn't skip the family prayers. And Christmas morning we didn't open the presents under the tree until we had family prayers. So we grew up with the understanding that the Scriptures were top priority. Then we had Bible reading and prayer at the end of dinner every night as we sat around the table, and up until the age of, I suppose, seven or eight, each of us children was put to bed by one of our parents and prayed with, and sometimes we had the Bible read to us again. So we heard the Bible read aloud at least twice a day, sometimes three times a day. And the other very, very powerful influence in our lives, I'm sure, was the fact that my father got up himself between 4:30 and 5:00 in order to have time alone with the Lord. And when we came to breakfast, we knew that we had been prayed for by, meaning my father was in his study for those hours before breakfast with his prayer lists and his notebooks and his Bible and down on his knees praying for us. My mother (you asked me to describe my mother), she was...she was very attractive. I'm sure she had lots of boyfriends (we heard some of those boyfriend stories). She was one of the very first women drivers in Philadelphia. Her father had bought her a beautiful Buick. He was a fairly well-to-do man in the lumber business, and she had this fancy Buick with, well, what we would call a convertible now with one of those big top-down things. And she had a gorgeous beaver hat and a raccoon coat that she wore so she was quite a dashing figure in Philadelphia, driving this car when she was seventeen years old. And had a great sense of humor. She used to laugh 'til she cried. I think we've all inherited that from...from my mother. My father had a very dry sense of humor and very self-deprecating and we would just die laughing at his descriptions of himself. I can see my mother wiping her eyes at the table laughing at my father.

**SHUSTER:** Do you recall any of those?

**ELLIOT:** Oh, his description of himself as a young boy was that he...he was long and gangly and he had a shock of straw-colored hair that always fell down over his eyes and he wore short pants and black cotton stockings that usually had holes in the knees and high-topped shoes and he said that he was reared on...he said that...he used to say to us, "When your mother was eating red roast beef, I was eating Beauregard eggs, fried smelts, and jelly," which sounds absolutely horrible. Beauregard eggs was this particular style of scrambled eggs, I guess, that they had in those days, but we used to laugh at that. He grew up in a relatively poor family, but an intellectual family and that was also a point of much joking between my parents. My father had graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with Phi Beta Kappa and my mother did not go to college at all. In fact, high school was only until one o'clock in the afternoon and she said they never had any homework so we just joked with her about her not having any education. She was a very widely read person and had an excellent vocabulary and could certainly hold her own in discussions with my father, but if ever my father could solve a problem that she couldn't, we would all say, "Well, that's what comes with a college education." And we would say exactly the same thing if she couldn't, you know, sarcastically we would say, "Well, there's what you get with a college education," which she had not had [Pauses, consults notes]. Let's see.... My mother kept a switch in every room with which to spank us. There was very strict discipline and



it was perfectly clear to us children who was in charge. We were never in charge. If my father was at home, he was in charge. If my mother was at home without him, she was in charge. What they said, they meant, and there was no doubt in our minds about that. They expected obedience and they expected immediate obedience. Delayed obedience was treated as disobedience, and this little switch would be just a piece off a bush. It might be eighteen inches long, and mother kept it over the lintel of the door in every room so that we knew it was there and it had been used early enough in our lives so that it didn't really have to be used very often. My mother always said that most parents did not start soon enough to discipline their children, and if they didn't start by the time they were eighteen months old, it was too late. So when she raised her eyes to the top of the door, it was usually enough to galvanize us into action.

**SHUSTER:** What effect do you think that had on you and your brothers and sisters?

**ELLIOT:** I think it helped us to be disciplined. I don't think that it's possible to discipline your children unless you are disciplined yourself, and I think all of us have...had the advantage of knowing that obedience is the other side of love. Our parents loved us and therefore expected us to be obedient, and therefore were willing to say "No" to us where other parents would shift the line. My grandfather had told them when they were newlyweds that they must be very careful of what they made issues of, because if you make an issue with a child, then you must carry through. And they probably made the mistake of creating too many issues for the first couple ones. I...I being the second child always felt that the younger ones got away with things we would never had gotten away with. There were kind of three...two sets of children in our family. There were the three old...older ones and then there was a gap of six years before the next two came along and then there was a gap of five years, so I felt as though I sort of raised my youngest brother. I was thirteen when he was born.

**SHUSTER:** Who else were important influences on you as a child?

**ELLIOT:** My grand...my Howard grandparents I would say would be the next most important. They were just wonderful people who loved having us come to visit. My maternal grandparents were very different. They were stiff and reserved and, although we were invited to their home every other Sunday for dinner, it was a very formal dinner with a maid in a white uniform and we were given to understand that the sooner we disappeared into the backyard after lunch, the better they would like it. And we were ushered in to say goodbye to them and that was about it. I don't remember ever seeing that grandfather smile and never do I remember addressing a remark to any of us. The Howard grandparents were warm and loving and open and obviously thrilled to see us whenever we could come, which was every week or so.

**SHUSTER:** Both sets of grandparents lived in Philadelphia?

**ELLIOT:** Yes, they both lived within walking distance of where we were, so that was a great advantage. And the other powerful influence would have been the many missionaries that came through our home. We had...my parents took hospitality very seriously as a Christian command and we did a tremendous amount of entertaining. It was very, very plain and simple entertaining. My mother didn't change the menu or make a fancy dessert. She never made desserts at all.

Dessert in our family was usually canned fruit and bought cookies because she didn't know how. But she would put an extra place on the table. When you have eight people to begin with its not too hard to add another person. But we did have the privilege of meeting dozens, probably hundreds of missionaries. She had a guest book that had forty-two countries represented in it.

**SHUSTER:** Who do you recall of those guests that made a particular impression on you?

**ELLIOT:** Betty Scott Stam would probably be the most impressive to me. I was a very small child the first time she came (the only time that she came, as far as I know). But what impressed me was a few years later when I heard the story of how she and her husband John had been beheaded by Chinese communists [in 1934] and I got a glimpse then of what discipleship may entail. And it was when I was about twelve I think when I came across her prayer of consecration and I copied that into my Bible and made it a prayer of my life. So that was...that was a powerful influence. There were others. Her father was one who did visit our home many times. His name was Dr. Charles Ernest Scott and he wrote me letters from China when I was just a little girl. There was a wonderful man from Belgium by the name of Mr. [Odilon] Vansteenbergh, who was one of the leaders of the Belgium Gospel Mission and he visited probably every year or so. He was a man of tremendous enthusiasm and good humor and godly wisdom and he was very fond of us children and we loved him, so we loved to have him come. Dr. L. L. Legters, one of the founders of Wycliffe, came and visited us. I remember sitting on his lap and hearing him tell Indian stories. I'm sure I could think of many others if I put my mind to it.

**SHUSTER:** What was your own spiritual growth...spiritual development in childhood?

**ELLIOT:** I don't have a specific date that I can go back and say that was the date I was saved. As I look back, I assume that I probably received the Lord as my Savior when I was four or five. I don't remember that. I can't remember a time when I didn't think I was a Christian, but it was when I was ten that I heard a sermon by Dr. Irwin Moon of Moody on [the Bible verse] John 3:3, "You must be born again." I wasn't really sure that I had been born again at that point and I wanted to make sure, so I made a public profession that night in the church in Philadelphia. When I was twelve I think I realized that if Jesus was my savior, he also had to be my Lord, so I then committed my life and said, "Lord, I want you to do anything you want with me," and prayed that prayer of Betty Scott Stam. It was...well, all during my teen years, I suppose, I went forward every time there was a invitation for those that were willing to commit their lives to the Lord for the mission field. Every time anybody would suggest that and we would be singing, "Where He leads me, I will follow," I...I would be one of those that raise my hand or went forward. It wasn't until I was a student here at Wheaton that I really felt clearly that God was calling me into missionary work and specifically into linguistics work (that's between my junior and senior years here). And after I graduated, of course, that's the direction in which I was moving. Amy Carmichael [1867-1951] would be the most powerful influence in my life spiritually speaking, outside of my own parents and my grandparents. Her writings were introduced to me when I was fourteen in the boarding school I attended in Florida and I've been reading her ever since. She wrote about forty books. I've memorized many of her poems and read many of her books more than once. I am now in the process of writing her biography.

**SHUSTER:** Why was she such an influence?

**ELLIOT:** Her writing is beautiful. I was drawn to the beauty of the writing. The uncompromising claim of Christ and the cost of discipleship drew me. I was...I was very powerfully drawn by the message of the cross and unconditional surrender and discipleship. Those were...those were things that really appealed to my...my imagination. And there's so much that's wishy-washy. There was then and there's a whole lot more now, but there was something so clean and pure and steel-like in Amy Carmichael, absolutely flint-like determination to be obedient and the message of obedience was just a very powerful thing in my life and still is.

**SHUSTER:** You mentioned that at every missions conference you probably went forward. When you thought about missions, what were your expectations? What...what did it conjure up in your mind?

**ELLIOT:** Always a thatched roof hut in a jungle. I was interested in Africa. I can't really remember why, unless it seemed like the darkest place on earth to me. But I read a lot of missionary stories. I read about Mary Slessor [1848-1915] and David Livingstone [1813-1873] and met a number of missionaries from Africa and sort decided that that would be the direction that I would move unless the Lord directed me otherwise. And I always imagined living in a very primitive place and would live in a hut. The first date that I ever had with Jim Elliot was to go to Moody Church to hear one of the daughters of C. T. Studd and she told about his death in a...in a hut in Africa and that just fit in with what I expected to do some day.

**SHUSTER:** What were the names...how would you describe the main stages [?] of your intellectual development when you were growing up?

**ELLIOT:** We lived in a very book-oriented house. There were books in every room. We had bookcases in the halls and upstairs and both bedrooms and the living room and the study and the dining room and everything. We were surrounded by books. My father being an editor was a stickler for good English and would read out loud to us from his favorite writers, people like Matthew Henry, George Barrow[?], and [Charles] Spurgeon, Jonathan Edwards, people whose English was majestic. And he kept a dictionary within reach of the dining room table at all times so whenever a discussion arose in the course of conversation about pronunciation or meaning, he would hand the dictionary to the child, we would have to look up the word and the rest of the family would have to learn it. So we...we knew what good English was supposed to sound like and they...neither parent would tolerate any mistakes or slang or anything. I hear parents nowadays excusing their children's poor English because they say it's what they learn in school. Well, we heard bad English in school too. It's what we heard at home that determined our speech and writing. We were not exposed to great literature. I don't remember ever hearing anything about Shakespeare or what I would think of now as the great novelists: Tolstoy and Jane...Charlotte Bronte or any of those people. The ones that I...the names that I gave you were certainly great in the Christian field but we were not oriented toward great music or great painting. My parents didn't really know very much about any of those things. Their focus was quite narrow but very, very sound, very solid stuff. We didn't...we weren't taught Christian ditties, for example. We learned theology by means of the great old hymns of the church. We



knew, as I said, that my father had gained the great honor of being in Phi Beta Kappa, but if ever I knew a genuinely humble man, it was my father. He...he was proud of that Phi Beta Kappa key and he wore it. Some people would say that you couldn't be humble and wear a Phi Beta Kappa key, but I don't think I ever heard him mention it to anybody except us kids. He...he wore a three piece suit with a gold chain and his Phi Beta Kappa key on the gold chain and it had a lot of babies' teeth marks on it, because all of us were allowed to play with it in church. But he really was a man of...of tremendous self...not only deprecation but just self-abandonment and he took a sane view of his own capabilities and was genuinely a humble man. He was a trustee of Wheaton [College in Illinois]. And Allen Emery, who was on the board at that time told me just not too long ago, that he wanted me to know what kind of man my father was. And he said at the Wheaton trustees meeting, whatever the subject was under discussion, everybody in the room would speak and tell what they thought. He said, "Your father would never open his mouth until everyone was finished, whereupon he would rise from his chair, which nobody else ever did," and he said, "in a very few, very clear, very well-chosen words, he would state his position and he would sit down." And he said, "As far as I was concerned, we didn't need to have listened to anybody else." He said, "If we had just had those two minutes, or whatever it was, from your father, the problem would have been adequately covered." He saw his Christian responsibilities being just exactly what he did routinely everyday - getting up in the morning at a certain time, doing his praying in a certain very specified, orderly way, reading his Bible, marking his Bible. I guess he read three chapters a day and five on Sundays all his life. Went through the Bible thirty or forty times. Got on the train, read, never wasted a minute, always had a good book. And he...his rule was, "Never read any new book until you have read two old ones, two books a hundred years old or so." And those were the books he had in his briefcase and he would read on the train or sometimes work on manuscripts. Went to the office, sat at his desk and read manuscripts, came home and read manuscripts. He brought home a briefcase and it never once crossed his mind to write a book. Could have written all kinds of fascinating books. He wrote editorials, very short, maybe three hundred and fifty to five hundred words for each...each issue, which was...it was a weekly magazine. And those editorials have been collected in two books which are priceless, I think. They've been out of print now because nobody has ever heard of Philip E. Howard Jr., but they sold modestly during his lifetime....

**SHUSTER:** Is this one of them?

**ELLIOT:** No, that was my grandfather that wrote that book. My grandfather was junior. But he would never have even thought of collecting those. It was somebody else's idea to collect those books [sic] and so there are two books with my father's name as author, but they were just written as editorials. And as I read them now, I find that it is powerful stuff, it's the kind of thing that I never get tired of and my brother Tom has said the same thing. It is one of the ironies of life that we don't really appreciate our parents until they are gone and until we're as old as they were when they died. But it would never have crossed his mind that he could write a book or that anybody would want to read it if he did. He was...one of his great gifts was to imitate birds and he was an amateur bird watcher. He could imitate sixty birds, sixty species, to absolute perfection. He was a member of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club. It was an amateur bird watchers club back in the days before there was even a term "bird watchers." He had started this on his own when he was a teenager. He used to go and walk in the woods alone and imitate

the birds, and so he could do this to perfection and as a hobby he would go around giving lectures on birds. He had a set of slides and he would put the slide on the...on the screen and then imitate the bird and tell about its habits. And he kept lists. Every single year he had a list of the birds that he had seen that year and a lifetime list.

**SHUSTER:** Did any of his children become passionate bird watchers?

**ELLIOT:** I don't think you could say passionate. Two of them...two of my brothers learned to identify birds and one of them learned to imitate to a certain degree, but my father longed for us to love the birds the way he did. None of us became that enthusiastic. He offered us prizes if we would learn x number of birds (I've forgotten what it was, twenty or something) and he would give us a field guide to the bird. If we learned fifty birds, he would give us a pair of binoculars and I think there were just two brothers that won the binoculars. And he had a different bird call for each of us children. Instead of calling us by name, he would give a bird call. And this was a very useful thing because in a crowded room or on a city street, for example, we...we would hear the tiny bird call where the average citizen doesn't hear birds at all. And if he had called us by name across the room or across the street, you know, other heads would have turned, but no one else noticed. And when he did arrive home in the evening from the office, the minute he opened the door we would hear his chickadee call, which was his call for my mother, and then she would answer with her version of a chickadee from the kitchen.

**SHUSTER:** What was your call?

**ELLIOT:** The wood pewee.

**SHUSTER:** What church did you attend to when you were growing up?

**ELLIOT:** As long as I lived in Philadelphia, which was up until I was nine years old, we went to the Reformed Episcopal Church, so I became acquainted with the Episcopal prayers and prayer book. When we moved to New Jersey, there wasn't such a church and we went for a short time to Carl McIntyre's church, (a Presbyterian church) but a very short time) and then we went to a Baptist church for a short time and my parents gave up and decided that the only church that was really teaching the Bible in that town was a small denomination called Bible Protestant. So we attended that church although I never joined it. I was...I came into...into the knowledge of who the Plymouth Brethren were when I came to Wheaton. I went to the Bible Church in Wheaton, but it was after I left Wheaton that I joined a group of Plymouth Brethren and it was in fellowship with them that I went to Ecuador.

**SHUSTER:** What do you recall about McIntyre's style of preaching?

**ELLIOT:** I don't recall anything at all except I...I can see him on an Easter Sunday morning, whether that was the first Sunday we went there, I don't remember, but he was dressed in a white suit and there was a bank of white lilies and he was very handsome and very oratorical, and I remember that we sang "My Faith Looks up to Thee," and I remember the words of the stanza that says, "Oh, may my love for thee, Pure, warm, and changeless be, A living fire""

**SHUSTER:** What...what part does church occupy in your memory...in your childhood?

**ELLIOT:** Generally, I think I was just bored to death. There was never...we never sat under a preacher that caught my imagination. It was.... And my Sunday School teachers, almost without exception, were just hopelessly poor as teachers. And I can remember us children complaining when we would get home about how we hated Sunday School and how we didn't get anything out of the lesson and the answer we always got was, "You mustn't criticize them. They're good, faithful souls." And the old lady whose class I had...one of the...one teacher that I remember probably most vividly, she was a...she was a very uneducated old lady with false teeth that clicked very badly. Her English was just abominable and we were...we were just totally turned off by anybody who ever made a mistake in English. I remember just being aghast when my fourth grade teacher mispronounced the word "reverberate." I couldn't believe my ears because I thought teachers were, of course, infallible and I knew that it was wrong. And this Sunday School teacher just murdered the King's English. And we would make fun and criticize and my parents would always shut us up and say, "They...they are good, faithful souls," you know, "They're really doing their best and they're serving the Lord." But I have very few recollections of being conscious of learning anything. Obviously, we learned a lot. We did learn the Bible and we certainly learned to find references. We won the Bible drills that we had in Sunday School and that kind of thing. And we went to daily vacation Bible school and young people's meetings and missionary meetings and Sunday night services and you name it. Whatever was going on in church, we were there.

**SHUSTER:** How did you come to attend Wheaton?

**ELLIOT:** That was pretty easy. My father was a trustee so we got a...I think we got free tuition in those days. My...I had an uncle and two aunts who had gone here, and I think my grandfather had been a trustee, and then when my father was a trustee that was really a godsend because we could not have afforded to come here otherwise.

**SHUSTER:** So you never considered any other places?

**ELLIOT:** I thought about going to Penn. My father very much hoped that one of his children would go to the University of Pennsylvania, but I didn't actually apply and I don't think any of the rest of us did.

**SHUSTER:** Was your trip to Wheaton your first trip to the Midwest?

**ELLIOT:** Yes.

**SHUSTER:** Had you been out here before?

**ELLIOT:** No, I hadn't been here.

**SHUSTER:** Do you recall what your first impression was when you arrived here?

**ELLIOT:** Rainy day. I took the...what we called the 'Roaring Elgin' out from Chicago and was met by my "big sister." [An upperclass student assigned to help a freshman adapt to campus life.] We had a big and little sister program then. I don't know if they still have that, but she met me at the station and I think we took a taxi (there wasn't any college transportation). We took a taxi to the dormitory and I was put in the top floor of what was then North Hall (I guess it's McManis now) and it was just that one section that was built then. And because this was during the war (the fall of '44) there were twelve hundred women and three hundred men on the campus so they were just absolutely desperate for space for women in the dormitories and they put two girls in rooms that were built for single rooms and that was just sheer misery. I lived in that top floor in what was supposed to be a single room. We had two beds but we only had one dresser and one desk and one closet, and I had the great good luck of rooming with a girl who had thousands of clothes. Her father had a department store, so we used...it just took a major effort to hang up a dress or to get anything out. With all your strength you'd have to shove the stuff over and I had about four inches of the closet and she had the rest. It was a bad scene.

**SHUSTER:** What...what other effect did the war have on Wheaton?

**ELLIOT:** Uh...I suppose that ra...probably rationing was still on. We probably didn't get very much meat in the dining hall. I thought the food was just the most marvelous food I'd ever seen in my life because I had come from a boarding school where we didn...we had far, far worse food. I just remember the many veterans, you know, with wooden legs and false arms and what not. We had a number of them. Wheelchair cases and guys with canes. There were two guys in my class that had...had lost an arm. I really don't remember anything else particularly but it affected the campus. I always took the view throughout my life that wherever I was, I was the only person that didn't know what they were doing. Everybody else knew what they were doing and arriving here was scary and I figured everybody else in the freshman class knew exactly what they were going to do and where they were going. I didn't know anything so I depended heavily, heavily on my big sister to help me out on that.

**SHUSTER:** Was she helpful?

**ELLIOT:** She was. The freshman orientation program to me was just horribly embarrassing. The wearing the dinks [a small skull cap] and all that...I never was the kind that could join in crazy stuff like that. I like clowning and I...I'm a frustrated actress I think myself, but that nonsense of going to class with your hair in curlers or your face...face cream on or something was just utterly, utterly embarrassing and...and foolish to me.

**SHUSTER:** That was also...'44 was the year that YFC [Youth for Christ] was getting started in Chicago under Torrey Johnson and Robert Cook.

**ELLIOT:** Yes. I...I went to the Soldiers Field rally which I think was the first one they had in Soldiers Field and they had a choir of 5,000. I was one of those.

**SHUSTER:** What do you recall about the meeting?

**ELLIOT:** Not anything at all except the impression of this overwhelming crowd and the...the thrill of singing in a choir like that. I think it was a cold, miserable day as I recall, but it was just the....

**SHUSTER:** What was the audience like? How...what was their response?

**ELLIOT:** I don't remember anything like that. I thought this was tremendous that we could get this many people to come hear the Gospel and Torrey's preaching was tremendous, I thought.

**SHUSTER:** Was it easy to get from Wheaton to Chicago in 1944?

**ELLIOT:** Yes. Very easy because you just got on the train...but I...I...I don't think that I went to Chicago more than four or five times in the four years that I was here. I went in for that, I had maybe one date in Chi...two dates in Chicago that I can recall in my four years and...well, no, three counting the one that I mentioned with Jim Elliot. I also went to dinner and a concert with one...with another guy and I went to a soccer game with a third. I think those were my three Chicago experiences besides going in for the Torrey Johnson meeting and I went into Newberry Library one time to do a term paper for Dr. [Clyde] Kilby.

**SHUSTER:** How did you happen to be in the chorus for that...or rather be in the choir for that Soldiers Field meeting?

**ELLIOT:** Well, I loved to sing. I had always loved to sing and had been told I had a good voice. I had sung in a choir in high school and had sung solos, but then when I came to Wheaton, I tried out for both the Women's Glee Club and the Chapel Choir and I didn't make either one. I did finally make the Women's Glee Club when I was a senior because I had been taking lessons from Mrs. McKenzie, but before that, didn't make it.

**SHUSTER:** So they...there was an announcement in the paper asking for volunteers or how did you...?

**ELLIOT:** Oh, I think they...they announced it here, you know, in chapel, told about it and asked for volunteers and I really don't recall, but I think they probably provided buses or something for Wheaton kids to go in because a huge number of us went in for that.

**SHUSTER:** You mentioned your three dates in Chicago. What was a typical date like at Wheaton?

**ELLIOT:** Well, I'm not the one to ask about that. I mean, a typical date in Wheaton was certainly not with me, that's for sure. I was definitely a wallflower. There were very few.... One of the three dates was not a man from campus. He was an old buddy of the family that happened to be stationed at Great Lakes in the Navy so he'd come out and take me in. I guess there were a lot of girls that regularly had dates for campus affairs. There weren't that many things to do off campus. We couldn't go to movies in those days and so it was a concert or a game or something. There were certain girls in the dormitory, they just always went. They always had dates and I



was the one that never went, never had a date for anything. The big affairs like the Washington Banquet, I finally had one date in four years for that.

**SHUSTER:** What were some of the major spiritual events, activities on campus during the years you were here?

**ELLIOT:** Foreign Missions Fellowship was quite strong in those days, and I was a very enthusiastic member of Foreign Missions Fellowship. I can think back on very few chapel speakers that I remember, but Dr. Harry Ironside was one. Stephen Olford made a tremendous impression. He was a man 27 years old and spoke for a week in Chapel and not very many people spoke twice in a row, let alone for a week. I believe Dr. Ironside had a week and Stephen Olford had a week and he spoke very plainly and straightly about the whole business of bringing your love life under Christ's control and that had a profound influence on both Jim and me. We both started spiritual journals as a result of Stephen Olford's suggestion. Ruth Stoll [?] was a missionary speaker that made a...made an impression on me. She was from Peru and I really don't remember anything that she said other than vague impression of fascinating jungle stories, but she said, using the illustration of the feeding of the five thousand, if your life is broken when given to Jesus, it's because pieces will satisfy a multitude when a loaf would only satisfy a little lad. And Dr. Joseph Macaulay was the minister at the [Wheaton] Bible Church. And I went very faithfully, Sunday morning and evening, to that. And I remember his saying that when the woman broke the alabaster box, he said, "There will always be a Judas to say, 'Why this waste?', but remember that the house was filled with the odor of the ointment." And my Sunday School teacher was Catherine Cumming, who was a housemother at North Hall [a dorm on campus]. And she and I became very close friends even though she was a woman, probably in her 60's by then. Both she and I felt that there really wasn't much of an age difference. She told me that she felt as close to me as if I had been her age and I felt that way and we spent a great deal of time together. And she...she was a most interesting woman because she had come from a very, very wealthy Georgia family and had been disowned because she had become a Christian and would have inherited millions and was cut off and had to be a housemother at Wheaton. I don't think very many people knew that.

**SHUSTER:** What attracted you to her? What...?

**ELLIOT:** Her spirituality. She had paid a price for being a Christian and she was funny, she was cute, she had this terrific Georgia accent. She used to call me, "Baa-by" [imitates Georgian accent], and talked with this terrific accent. I used to tease her about it and imitate her. She was a little, short, dumpy lady with a very ample bosom and she was always clasping her bosom and say, "Baa-by, baa-by." I remember her asking me to give a testimony in her Sunday School class, which I did with great trepidation and it was a class of, maybe, fifty girls at the Bible Church and we walked home together, back to the dormitory, and we walked in silence, and finally she said, "Baa-by, you know, God has given you a gift to express deep things powerfully and concisely." And she was a spiritual mother to me and she prayed for me for years.

**SHUSTER:** Who were some of the other people on campus who influenced you?

**ELLIOT:** There were some students. I remember Marcia Bell who was a girl in my class. I thought she was just staggeringly brilliant. She lived in a room next to me in North Hall and she taught me how to take notes. I often wonder how I would have ever gotten through college.... She had gone to Oak Park High School where they taught kids college methods of taking notes on lectures. She taught me how to take notes, and she taught me how to organize my notebook and my time, and I think she did that without realizing she even did it, you know, it was just an example. She set an example. [Pauses] A woman named Eleanor Vandevort was also a student in the class of '49 who...whom I met during my senior year because we both took tumbling. I'd never been able to stand on my head or do a cartwheel and the only P...P.E. class that fit my schedule that year was tumbling so I took that class. I think the reason the Lord let me do it was to meet this woman. She went to Africa as a missionary but became...we became very close friends and she used to come up to my room in Williston [a dormitory] before meals. And she ate in lower Williston and I ate in upper. (In those days we had two dining rooms. We always said the humble people ate in the lower one and I ate in the upper one.) But she would come and we would read the Scriptures together and very often pray together and she had become...she was one of my closest friends and is still a very close friend and lives near me in Massachusetts now. I'm trying to think who.... Dr. [Charles C.] Brooks was the dean of students then and Dr. Brooks' whole bearing and manner and obvious sanctity was a very clear message. I remember his reciting the words of that hymn, "So wash me now, without, within. Oh purge with fire, if that must be. No matter how, if only sin die out in me." And Mrs. [Corinne] Smith was the dean of women and she set a beautiful example of what a Christian woman should be, dignified, Godly, feminine, cheerful and uncompromising. I don't think women today give very much thought to how powerful just a silent example is. Mrs. Smith certainly didn't do a whole lot of talking. She wasn't in a position to do much talking. She...she was just there and in those days the faculty and administration sat on the platform, so every day we sat and looked at those people. And Mrs. Smith was like this [sits up very straight], you know, perfect posture, perfect grooming and [pauses] I admired that. Nowadays people would make fun of it and say she was just too unbending and prim and stiff and that kind of thing did not impress me at all, primness. I was a freshman for the very last year that old Dr. [Katherine B.] Tiffany, Mrs. Tiffany, taught and we had freshman writing and we could take a test so that you only had to take half a year. And I managed to pass so I got in the advanced writing class and Mrs. Tiffany was our professor and she stood up on the very first day and I have never forgotten the bass voice in which she spoke. And the first thing she said was, "There will be no makeup work of any kind, for any reason. Sickness is an economic loss." Case closed. And that was...that was as clear as anything. We knew exactly where we stood, what she expected and I loved that.

**SHUSTER:** You mentioned Dr. [Clyde] Kilby. How would you describe him as a teacher?

**ELLIOT:** Maverick, I guess. He was a startling man. As I look back, I realize I did not even begin to...to learn all I should have learned from him and the things that I've learned second hand from Dr. Kilby I wish I had had...had had the brains and the reception to get it myself because other people have told me.... My brother Tom of course was greatly influenced by Dr. Kilby and I've learned a lot through him. But I just remember a general impression...impression of Dr. Kilby being humorous in a way I had never seen before. Not afraid to say something very unorthodox just in order to challenge us to challenge him and he was...he was an encouragement

to me. I just remember receiving a paper back from him where he had...on which he had written, "A very unusual paper, excellent in every way. A+" And I had not had very many people in my life that affirmed me. That's a word that did not occur in our vocabulary in those days. But that's what he really did, you know. And I was...I was thrilled by that. But I really...I didn't get to know him at all. I've gotten to know him in later years but I missed out a great deal by only having one course from him, one semester.

**SHUSTER:** Which course was that?

**ELLIOT:** Eighteenth-century literature.

**SHUSTER:** Did you develop any intellectual interest at Wheaton you did not have before?

**ELLIOT:** Well, certainly. I majored in Greek and that was the last thing in my mind when I came to Wheaton. I came with the idea of being a pre-med major and switched very quickly to English and switched from English to Greek major between my junior and senior year. I took first-year Greek my junior year and took second year in summer school with Dr. [Robert C.] Stone (and he was a favorite professor) and then I took third and fourth year together my senior year, so that was a tremendous experience. And I attribute my love for Greek to my professor in first year Greek, who was Mrs. Ludwigson [Dr. Kathryn (Miller) Ludwigson], who was twenty-one years old. She had graduated the year before. She became Mrs. Ludwigson the following year. Dr. [C. Raymond] Ludwigson's wife died that year and he.... I remember Kay coming back from Christmas vacation and the rumors were flying around that she and Dr. Ludwigson were interested in each other. The first day of class there were forty-two men in the class and two women and Kay stood up--this cute, pretty, very feminine, very sweet woman. One of the first things she said was, "Anybody can learn Greek." And she literally inspired us and that of course was the great gift of a professor. If you can't inspire your kids, you're never make a great professor and she had never taught before in her life. But she inspired us.

**SHUSTER:** What was it that attracted you to Greek?

**ELLIOT:** I took it because I thought I was going into Bible translation work. That was the only reason. And I thought if you're going to learn Greek, you might as well learn classical Greek and then you can certainly read koine. So I majored in classical. I think my year was the last or Jim's year was the last year they had a classical major.

**SHUSTER:** What the extracurricular activities? How did you come to be involved in *The Record* [the college newspaper] and *Tower* [the college yearbook]?

**ELLIOT:** I took it for granted that I had a flair for writing. I had always gotten high grades in composition and enjoyed being on the school paper. Every school I had been in I had either joined or been asked to join the school paper and the school yearbook. I was the editor of my high school yearbook. So I just thought that's what you do if you can write. And I...it scared me to...I remember when I signed to be a cub reporter for *The Record*, I...it just scared me to death. I'd go in there and here were all these juniors and seniors that just talked like pros and I thought,

“I’ll never be able to do this.” I don’t know how long I did it, maybe two years, but I don’t think I set any Th...I didn’t set the Thames alight, that’s for sure.

**SHUSTER:** Were there other activities that you were involved in that you think were especially meaningful to you?

**ELLIOT:** Yes, everybody joined literary societies in those days and I was in one of those and got a certain amount of experience in public speaking. But by far the most important training for that was my debating. I was on the debate squad and made varsity debate my [pauses slightly] sophomore year, I guess, and won...won a championship, the whole Northwest championship with my debate colleague and...when I was a junior. And that is certainly the best training I ever had for public speaking and thinking on your feet and poise and speaking up and speaking out and that kind of thing.

**SHUSTER:** What was debate like? What were the.... What was a typical debate subject [?] like?

**ELLIOT:** Well, the subject was the most crashingly boring subject imaginable. I can remember debating on compulsory arbitration and free trade, that kind of thing. Of course, it was one question per year, so you would research everything you could on that subject and....

**SHUSTER:** What was the question the year you won the championship?

**ELLIOT:** I think it was compulsory arbitration, but I am not really positive. And we went on...the fun part was going on trips off campus with Dr. [Clarence] Nystrom or Dr. Barker. Glenn Barker was the other speech professor whose wife was on the team. She was a student and he was a professor, so that was a very convenient arrangement for the college, because they didn’t have to pay an extra chaperon to go along. And Dr. Nystrom, the last thing he would ever do would be to affirm anybody. He would just not...he would fall over backwards before he would let you know that he thought you were doing well and the year that we won the championship and one man on the forensic team won the oratory championship in the same tournament, we were of course just ecstatic in the car back from Minneapolis and Dr. Nystrom never said a word, never congratulated, not a syllable about anything. You know, we might as well have lost everything as far as anything he said. So when he got...when we got to this guy’s house, the one that had just won the oratory championship and he was...this guy was getting out of the car, I turned to Dr. Nystrom and I said, “Well, Dr. Nystrom, you must be proud of Art.” And with a small smile Dr. Nystrom said, “I think he has possibilities.”

**SHUSTER:** Now, why do you think he did that? Was that his technique?

**ELLIOT:** I think so. Dr. Nystrom was just a laconic man. He didn’t go in for all this effusiveness and affirmation and patting everybody on the back and I think we were more or less taught that when we did all, we were still unprofitable servants, which is a very healthy attitude to have.

**SHUSTER:** Did you have any contact with Dr. [Victor Raymond] Edman [president of the College, 1940-1967]?

**ELLIOT:** I certainly did. I cleaned his house every week and I ironed his shirts. I got that job. I needed to make my spending money at least and so I went to the employment office and found out that they needed somebody to clear the house and iron, so I went on Saturdays and cleaned the whole downstairs of Westgate and so on. Tuesdays in the afternoon I went and ironed seven white starched shirts of his plus everything else in the family. He had four sons and I did everybody's ironing and I don't remember having any more contact with Dr. Edman than any student but of course he was very remarkable in knowing everybody's first name. Within the first six weeks or so he knew every student on the campus by first name.

**SHUSTER:** Did he make any impression on you from the contacts you had with him?

**ELLIOT:** Yes. I don't think you really want to put these into anything you.... I mean, I was never terribly impressed because I thought he was very sentimental. You know, he used to get up in chapel and cry. When the Auca incident happened, of course I had graduated, but he overplayed and sentimentalized that story and just confirmed my suspicions about him, that he was more interested in the romance and the sentimentality, even to the point of embellishing a story and that...that bothered me.

**SHUSTER:** By sentimental, you mean emotional or idealized?

**ELLIOT:** Yes, both. We had what we called Gold Star chapels frequently during my years of college when...whenever they would receive) word that a Wheaton alumnus had been killed in the war, then we would have a Gold Star chapel in which they would memorialize that person. It...he was just too...too sentimental in the way he conducted it, you know. It...it bothered me and a number of us at that time.

**SHUSTER:** You mentioned a little earlier that (I think you mentioned)...that it was at Wheaton that you came in contact with the Plymouth Brethren?

**ELLIOT:** Yes.

**SHUSTER:** How did...

**ELLIOT:** I never....

**SHUSTER:** ...that happen?

**ELLIOT:** Well, Bethany Chapel...it was Bethany House which was started while I was a student here. It was just a house which was bought and they had meetings there. And the man who started it was the father of a friend of mine from high school days. So she invited me to come and I attended a few meetings there, but I didn't go there on Sundays. Occasionally I went there during the week. And I went to the [Wheaton] Bible Church regularly, faithfully.

**SHUSTER:** But eventually you went to the mission field under their...

**ELLIOT:** Yes, I was...

**SHUSTER:** ...[unclear]?

**ELLIOT:** ...persuaded finally after I left college and began attending it...a Plymouth Brethren Assembly in New Jersey. I was persuaded of the truth of it and Jim Elliot of course had a great...very strong influence in that direction because it...that was his background and he was absolutely dyed in the wool. There wasn't any...any debate at all as far he was concerned about the truth of it.

**SHUSTER:** Most Plymouth Brethren people I have met have been very strong in their nondenominational denomination. But what besides his...? [fire alarm goes off in background]

**ELLIOT:** What...?

**SHUSTER:** They're testing the fire alarms in the building all day. What besides his influence attracted you to the Plymouth Brethren?

**ELLIOT:** The idea that it was a literal attempt to imitate the New Testament church. That's what it looked like to me. I read E.H. Broadbent's *The Pilgrim Church* and was quite convinced by that. I knew next to nothing about church history and it sounded reasonable to me and I liked the strong Biblical emphasis and the Plymouth Brethren that I knew knew their Bibles backwards and forwards, even better than I did, and I hadn't come across people that knew their Bibles any better than we did. That impressed me. I like the simplicity...[fire alarm goes off].

**SHUSTER:** Considering your years at Wheaton, for good or bad, do you think Wheaton influenced you to be a different person than you would have been otherwise, if you had gone to another school or hadn't...hadn't contacted Wheaton at all?

**ELLIOT:** It's very hard...[fire alarm goes off] That kind of a question is very hard to answer, you know, the what-ifs and what-about. I just hope...[fire alarm goes off].

**SHUSTER:** Let me [fire alarm goes off] phrase it different way. What...what do you think is the main influence Wheaton had on you?

**ELLIOT:** Probably the people that I met were the...the most important because there was nothing different about what I learned at Wheaton than what I had had all my life. I'm sure it would be a very different answer from somebody who came from a non-Christian background or a liberal church background. And everything about Wheaton was just more of the same for me. But the people like Miss [Catherine] Cumming, and the friend...the lifetime student friend that I made, and, of course, meeting Jim Elliot was one of the most important things that happened to me at Wheaton. And just the...the maturing that takes place during your college years from seventeen to twenty-one is a crucial time anyway. I can remember being aware of...of the development of my intellect. When my father would come out for trustees meetings, we would eat meals together and we would sit in the dining room and he would just ply me with questions

and I was very aware that our conversation was on a different level than it had been before and we could talk about things that I wouldn't have been able to talk about with him, and I began to appreciate his intellectual powers at that time, and we developed a new kind of father-daughter relationship. But it...it was all part of the process of maturing. It's very difficult to say how much of it would have taken place if I had been somewhere other than Wheaton.

**SHUSTER:** Considering your later work as a missionary, how would you evaluate the preparation you received at Wheaton, and, related to that, was there anything either available at Wheaton or not available at Wheaton which you wish you had had?

**ELLIOT:** I can't think of anything that I wish I had had that I didn't get here. Maybe I'll think of ten things tonight, but nothing springs to my lips right now. I felt that...that it...it's...it's great training. I was delighted that my daughter was willing to come to Wheaton, too, because the powerful, daily, visible example of Christian professors to me is...is just incomparable. There isn't anything else as important in a young person's life as what they call "role models" now. I hate that word but.... I would rather say "visible examples" of what Christianity really is and we saw that. There were always the people who showed...showed us what it is and not only the professors but the chapel speakers too, that made a deep impression. I think that it's a tremendous privilege to get to sit under all these people and I learned lessons which stood me in very good stead as a missionary.

**SHUSTER:** That might be a good point for us to close the tape. I want to thank you very much for being willing to be interviewed.

**ELLIOT:** My pleasure.

**SHUSTER:** It's...of course, we haven't gotten very far into your missions career, but perhaps at some future time if you're ever in Wheaton again we might be able to make another interview.

**ELLIOT:** Uh huh.

**SHUSTER:** Thank you.

**ELLIOT:** You're welcome.

**END OF TAPE**