

End of the Spear: Biography of James Elliot

Philip James Elliot was born October 8, 1927, in Portland, OR, to Fred and Clara L. Elliot, one of three brothers in a family which included Robert, Herbert, and a sister, Jane. His father was an itinerant non-sectarian evangelist in the Puget Sound area and his mother conducted a chiropractic practice. Their home was frequently visited by missionaries who were an important influence on the family. By the time he was about eight years old, Jim was aware of his salvation by Christ.

He attended Benson Polytechnic High School, 1941-1945, majoring in architectural drawing and participating in sports with the goal of building his body for the rigors of missionary life. He also began preaching during these years. In his senior year, he was elected vice president of his class.

Jim chose to attend Wheaton College because of his brother Bob's recommendation; he enrolled in the fall of 1945 with the goal of total commitment to God and the active pursuit of the disciplines involved. He was granted a scholarship and worked part-time to support his studies. Elliot joined the wrestling team at Wheaton and made varsity in his freshman year. He began speaking to youth groups in the Wheaton area, and in his junior year began a journal as another means of spiritual discipline. In the summer of that year, 1947, he stayed six weeks in Mexico with the missionary family of his friend, Ron Harris. There he learned Spanish and felt his own call directed toward mission work in Latin America.

In 1948, Elliot and some of his friends narrowly escaped death in a car-train accident on the tracks in Wheaton. That year he was president of Foreign Mission Fellowship on campus and part of a gospel team for the Fellowship during the summer. Elliot chose Greek as his major, and graduated with highest honors in 1949. He lived with relatives in Glen Ellyn during his College years and attended Lombard Gospel Chapel.

For a year following graduation, Elliot returned to the family home in Portland to concentrate on Bible study. He worked at odd jobs and learned to preach on street corners, in jails, and at Plymouth Brethren assemblies. His future wife and former Wheaton College student, Elisabeth Howard, paid a visit to the Elliots on her return from summer missionary work in Canada. In June of 1950, Elliot spent several weeks in Norman, OK, at the Summer Institute of Linguistics, sponsored by Wycliffe Bible Translators. There he worked with a former missionary to the Quichua Indians of Ecuador and first heard of the remote and much-feared Huaorani tribe in that country. [The name commonly used for the tribe at the time was "Auca" and this was the name by which they were called in almost all the literature of the time period.] His response was immediate and, after a ten-day period of prayer for guidance, Elliot wrote to Dr. Wilfred Tidmarsh in Ecuador offering to come to that field. A recently abandoned station, Shandia, established for work with the Quichua Indians, was in need of staff.

Elliot stayed on in Oklahoma City to work with Bible study groups on the university campus; he applied for a passport on Dr. Tidmarsh's urging to come as soon as possible. In September of 1950, Ed McCully, another friend and Wheaton College student, wrote him indicating that he wanted to leave school and join a mission activity. The decision to go to Ecuador was postponed a year while Tidmarsh returned to England because they were unable to arrive in Ecuador before his necessary departure. During this period, Elliot preached, studied, and worked with youth in Huntington, IN, and Chester, IL, where Ed McCully and Bill Cathers joined him in working on a radio broadcast series, *The March of Truth*. Pete Fleming of Seattle, WA, also indicated an interest in going to Ecuador with Elliot. A visit to Portland from Tidmarsh confirmed the decision to work in Shandia and passport, visa, and draft board arrangements were made. Elisabeth Howard had also decided to do mission work in Ecuador, but she and Jim went as independent missionaries to separate assignments.

Preparations to leave for Ecuador occupied the second half of 1951; included was an itinerary through the East speaking to acquaint Plymouth Brethren there with the work and to raise support from those groups. Elliot and Fleming sailed to Ecuador on the *Santa Juana* on February 4, 1952, and Jim made his first journal entry on February 27 in Quito. Elisabeth Howard arrived in Quito in April, 1952, to study language, tropical diseases, and medical work.